ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	FROM KARBALA TO QĀDESIYYEH: THE SPECTACLE OF ARAB "OTHER" IN THE PERSIANATE AND PARSI LITERARY TRADITIONS
	Abbas Jamshidi, Doctor of Philosophy, 2018
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In early decades of the twentieth century, a distinct anti-Arab discourse emerged in modern Persianate literature. A complex process of identification and disidentification of self and "otherness" came to cast them as the "other" of the Persianate people who are represented as occupying a higher standing on an imaginary evolutionary scheme. While this view faced strong competing discourses in the 1960s and 1970, prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution, it did not fade completely. The present dissertation argues that the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran and its neighboring cultures in the nineteenth century, and a growing Shi'i conceptualization of "otherness," underlined the discourse that recast the Arabs as destroyers of Iran's antiquities.

As the title of this project indicates, two traumatic moments define the range of materials examined here. "From Karbala to Qādesiyyeh" tries to demonstrate how the mutable image of the "other" in some Persianate literary environments historically has

gone through certain changes where religious conceptualizations of self and "other" were displaced by ethnic ones. Examples of early Shiʿi poetry and performative practices like *taʿziyeh* performances and cursing rituals are sites where in Chapter One I examine the identity of this religious "other" as it ambivalently consisted of Omayyad Arabs, Ottoman Turks and Uzbeks. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this ambivalence was reduced in favor of an ethnic "other" who was resolved to destroy not Iran's Shiʿi faith but the Persian "nation." This was when the emergent ideology of modern Persian nationalism replaced Shiʿi-Sunni paradigms of self and "otherness" with tropes and discourses derived from colonial sciences of archaeology and anthropology. As a result, the newly conceptualized Arab "other" no longer came from the battle of Karbala (680 CE) which is a foundational moment for the Shiʿi faith; instead, he came from the battle of Qādesiyyeh (636 CE) which marked the downfall of the Sasanian Empire and the advent of Islam in Iran.

The career of renowned modern writer, Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951), tends to epitomize this epistemological shift. As a preamble to my study of Hedayat, in Chapter Two, I briefly investigate the emergence of antiquarianism in nineteenth-century Iran in the works of revolutionary poet, Mirzādeh ʿEshqi (1894-1924). I argue that ʿEshqi's romantic reception of Iran's antiquities, especially the Ctesiphon ruins where the remains of the Sasanian past could be seen, was a watershed moment for the formation of an antiquarian discourse in modern Persian literature. This was when ʿEshqi transplanted "footsteps of a barefooted Arab" at the Ctesiphon ruins in an effort to restore the latter's agency as the purported destroyer of Iran's pre-Islamic glories.

As I argue in Chapter Three, Hedayat transformed ʿEshqi's imaginary encounter with the Arab "other" into a political theatre where presumptions about the inferiority of Arab material culture, especially their uncouth appearance and humble source of subsistence, function as the armature of the evolutionary discourse he directs at them. Hedayat's appropriation of the findings of European sciences of archaeology and anthropology – popular among elite circles in Iran in 1920s and 1930s – tends to frame his representations of Arabs as some "primitive" people attacking a superior Persian civilization. The racial anthropological underpinnings of his writings reached an unprecedented level when in one of his satirical works, he paraded the Arabs in a human zoo (ethnological exhibition) in Berlin supposedly to expose their "barbarous" deeds and creeds. By submitting the Arabs to the category of "savages," Hedayat mobilized the pernicious tropes and discourses of certain colonial exhibitions where Africans and "Orientals" were put on display in Europe as signifiers of alterity.

In Chapter Four, I argue that certain colonial elites in the Indo-Persian community of India, known as the Parsis, played a vital role in fostering the absorption of colonial sciences of archaeology and anthropology in the elite discourses of history and literature in nineteenth-century Iran. Examining the writings of Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890), the well-known emissary who was sent from Mumbai to Iran to improve the lives of its Zoroastrian community, can shed light on how the image of Arabs as "uncivilized" destroyers of Iran's ancient glories was discursively manufactured by projecting onto them the very practices Hataria observed among contemporary Persians when it came to failing to protect their country's ancient heritage.

The Parsi texts examined here capture a vibrant interplay between age-old Persian concepts, and tropes and discourses they borrowed from European colonial literature. Exploring the intertextual continuities we find between the two traditions can offer fascinating comparative insight into the polyphony of voices that animates the Persianate literature in its trans-regional reach.

FROM KARBALA TO QĀDESIYYEH: THE SPECTACLE OF ARAB "OTHER" IN THE PERSIANATE AND PARSI LITERARY TRADITIONS

by

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Dedicated with love to Maryam
for all her support throughout the years.

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The first sparks of the present project came to me more than a decade ago in Iran. Reading Abbas Maʿrūfi's *Peikar-e Farhād* (Farhād's Corpse, 2002) made it clear to me that even radically feminist rewritings of Sadeq Hedayat's *Būf-e Kūr* (The Blind Owl, 1936) still end up reiterating the latter writer's animadversion toward the Arabs. Considering Maʿrūfi's work vis-à-vis similar content I found in certain medieval works like the *Shāhnāmeh* (1010) provided me with a chronology and a potential roadmap for investigating the trajectories of the representation of Arabs in the Persianate tradition. I have benefitted from the support of many people during the time I was researching this topic and trying to conceive the arguments I put forward in this dissertation. Without their support, I have not been able to finish this project.

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A Note on Transliteration and Translation

Throughout this dissertation, I follow a simplified version of International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) system of transliteration for both consonant and vowels. Diacritics are only used for long vowels such as ā, ī, and ū and consonants are not marked by any diacritics. I have eliminated the esoteric marks differentiating the letters in Persian alphabet that derive from Arabic with the exception of ʿ and ʾ which in the texts studied here mark the Arabo-Islamic provenance of certain terms (such as, *taʿziyeh* and *madāʾen*). The silent letter "v" in words like "khāb" and "khāhar" has not been reproduced. To make my research more accessible to readers coming from non-Persian Studies backgrounds, I have tried to simplify the names of the individuals whose works or views I discuss. Thus, complete names are only used for the first time they are mentioned in the text and simplified henceforth by a familiar word. For example, Mirzādeh ʿEshqi will become ʿEshqi. In a similar manner, the original titles of Persian works are only mentioned the first time they appear in the text, relying thereafter on simplified English translations throughout the discussions. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

Introduction: Toward a Discourse of "Othering"

The present dissertation examines the genealogy of the representations of Arabs in the Persianate and Parsi literary traditions, with a focus on the works written in 1920s-1950s.[1] Culled at the interstices of disciplines and national literatures, the textual, performative as well as theological materials I examine here were written in a geographical ambit consisting today of modern Iran, the Indian subcontinent and England, roughly between mid-nineteenth century and today. The intellectual history highlighted here is animated by great mobility of ideas as writers in Iran, the Indian subcontinent and England constantly drew on each other, creating a fascinating intertextual dialogue. This intertextuality has engendered a palimpsestic quality for the representations of Arabs as modern re-readings of classical texts have given rise to an accretion of ideologies and tropes that may be isolated at specific moments in time.

Driven at times by religious dogma and at others by ethnocentric prejudice, the identity of Arabs in the texts selected here has gone through certain phases. Contextualizing these phases with relevant sociocultural factors can let us probe the manner this identity has been discursively constructed at the moment those texts were authored. The elevation of Shiʿism as Iran's official religion by the Safavids in 1502 CE

[1] The term "Persianate" was coined by Marshall Hodgson to describe the cultural traditions in the Islamic world that were "carried in Persian or reflect[ed] Persian inspiration." See *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1974). In this dissertation, Persianate mainly refers to texts that were written in Iran and the Indian Subcontinent by Persian and Parsi writers, respectively.

generated intense intellectual activity in the Persianate world, demarcating Self and "Other" in the texts written in the period between the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. The literature produced during this time was profoundly preoccupied with the grand narratives of Shiʿi piety as the martyrdom of the third Shiʿi Imam, Hossein ibn ʿAli, in 680 CE became a foundational moment for it. Following a clear-cut division of characters, popular Shiʿi *taʿziyeh* performances (passion plays) bifurcated the historical personages of the Karbala narrative into two separate groups that may be described as "the good Arabs" (reserved for Shiʿis saints) and "the bad Arabs" (reserved for the enemies of Shiʿi saints).[2] From a chronological standpoint, the Manichean dichotomy at the heart of such allegorizations appears to be the earliest moment where an ideological capital is used for representing the Arabs as distinct from and inferior to the Persians.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the emergent ideology of modern Persian nationalism reactivated a new identity politics in the Persianate world. Appropriating the findings of sciences of archaeology and anthropology, Persian nationalists secularized the discourse of "othering" we find in the *taʿziyeh* performances by recasting the Arabs as the "savage" destroyers of Iran's glorious pre-Islamic civilization. In the repertoire of nationalist texts that was produced in the early decades of the twentieth century in Iran, the much-reviled Sunni faith of the newly conceptualized

[2] The name of these performances derives from the Arabic root *ʿazāʾ* ("to mourn"). Other interchangeable names commonly used include *shabīh* ("resemblance" or "impersonation") and *shabīh-khāni* ("play of resemblances"). The latter two name stress the principle of anti-mimetism at the heart of these performances since the actors are not supposed to embody the holy figures they represent in these performances.

"Semite Arab" was consigned to a collective amnesia. The newly imagined identity of the Arabs was articulated within an emergent antiquarian discourse that cast them as ethnic "others" responsible for the destruction of Iran's ancient monuments, which were understood as national relics of a glorious past.

The Parsi section of this dissertation is animated by an equally fascinating mobility of ideas. The movement of ideas in this section are largely from the outside to inside of Iran as certain colonial elites of the Indo-Persian community of India – chief among them was the Parsi emissary, Manekji Limji Hataria, who resided in Iran for 25 years – facilitated the emergence of modern Persian nationalism in Iran in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Zoroastrian diaspora of Mumbai, known as the Parsis, have left behind a lasting legacy in fostering the absorption of sciences of archaeology and anthropology in the elite discourses of history and literature in Iran; discourses that became key sites for identification and disidentification of Self and "Other" in modern Iran.

Methodology

In the present dissertation, I strive to map the trajectories of the representation of Arabs in textual and performative traditions that span over several genres and disciplines including literature and Shiʿi passion plays, travel writing and modern theatre. Since the generic horizon of the texts and traditions examined here vary from case to case, I shall try to contextualize these utterances with relevant sociocultural information so that they may be understood in the particular moment and context they were created. By identifying the audiences that were potentially exposed to these texts and traditions, I

shall consider the salience of these utterances. For example, the relatively limited circulation of ideas among an elite coterie of intellectuals – in the early stages of the discourse I identify in this dissertation – shall be differentiated from the more popular iterations that may be found in a large repertoire of texts and performances.

A number of works examined here are canonical texts of modern Persian literature. For example, the early epic, *Shāhnāmeh* (Book of Kings, 1010 CE), has been canonized as one of the foundational texts of the Persianate literary tradition. A second set of texts and traditions that are examined in this dissertation do not possess the "aura" of such canonical works since they have not been the subject of serious scholarly studies in the past. The influence certain Parsis of India exerted on late nineteenth-century intellectuals in Iran, or the notoriously satirical works of Sadeq Hedayat are two examples of this second group of works. The fact that many of the texts in this category are still in manuscript format has contributed to their marginalization in scholarly deliberations. By drawing on mostly unpublished manuscripts or recently published documents such as letters and correspondences, I shall try to propose new arguments that hopefully can lead to a better understanding of the topic I examine in this dissertation. I have done my best to present an objective and balanced picture of the complex topics I study in this dissertation hoping that my exploration of the legacy of Arab representation may provide useful information for educational initiatives that look at modern incarnations of prejudice against other people as preventable.

Armature of a Discourse of "Othering"

The mutable image of Arabs has gone through certain changes in the Persianate tradition. The *early epic* in Persian (written in the tenth and eleventh centuries) is a crucial locus for probing the emergence of Arabs as important agents in the narrative of Persian history. Ferdowsi's epic, the *Shāhnāmeh* (1010 CE), records one of the earliest moments in this regard when invading Muslim Arabs start imposing themselves on the attention of the Persians; thus, stimulating a discourse for identification and disidentification of the Self and the "Other" in certain Persianate environments. Narratives of early encounter such as the *Shāhnāmeh* register the traumatic encounter between the Persians and the invading Arabs at the so-called contact zone. Throughout this dissertation, I shall be using the Moscow edition of the *Shāhnāmeh* (1960).

It may be argued that Ferdowsi's work has become a reservoir of ideological and rhetorical capital for anti-Arab representation in Persian literature *not only* because of the "misreadings" of certain Iranian nationalists in the past century or so. The concluding section of this book, "Pādeshāhi-ye Yazdgerd" (The Kingship of Yazdgerd), which is usually read as a chronicle of the downfall of the Sasanian Empire and the coming of Muslim Arabs to Iran, resonates with a complex network of anti-Arab imagery that runs underneath its historical narration. Reading the "Kingship of Yazdgerd" vis-à-vis pre-Islamic Zoroastrian texts can help us investigate this network of anti-Arab representation.[3] Such a reading can reveal how the final section of the *Shāhnāmeh* was in

[3] Some scholars have pointed out the affinities that exist between the content of Rostam Farrokhzād's letter in the concluding section of the *Shāhnāmeh* and the apocalyptic genre of

fact shaped by the narrative and discursive dynamics of apocalyptic Zoroastrian writings. The affinities that exist between "Kingship of Yazdgerd" and these Zoroastrian texts tell us that its general narrative trajectory and especially the content of Rustam Farrokhzād's letter inside it were largely elaborations of what we can find in apocalyptic and demonological writings of various Zoroastrian priests. Such elaborations arguably reveal the fundamentally Zoroastrian underpinnings of the concluding section of the *Shāhnāmeh* as it populated its end-of-time narrative with certain entities derived from Zoroastrian demonology. Interdisciplinary investigations such as these can provide valuable information about the continuities that exist between pre-Islamic and Islamic-era literatures as the traumatic experiences of the Zoroastrian community – recorded for example in the apocalyptic genre – continued to frame the discursive construction of the identity of Arabs in the works that were written in the Islamic era.

Another originary moment that had an equally consequential impact on the emergence of a discourse of anti-Arab representation in the Persianate tradition was the publication of *Kafan-e Siyāh* (The Black Shroud, 1916; henceforth *Black Shroud*), a closet drama written by the revolutionary poet and journalist, Mirzādeh ʿEshqi (1894-1924). The

Zoroastrian writing that was popular in the early centuries of Islamic-era Iran. Examining the traumatic experience these Zoroastrian texts capture can provide valuable information about the demonic topoi we find in Rostam Farrokhzād's representation of the Arabs. For the impact of Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature on the *Shāhnāmeh,* see Krasnowolska, "Rostam Farrokhzād's Prophecy in *Shāh-nāme* and the Zoroastrian Apocalyptic Texts," and Cereti, "Zoroastrian Apocalyptics in the *Shāhnāma.*"

xenophobic rhetoric of this work can help us identify the armature of the discourse ʿEshqi mobilized against the Arabs for casting them as the "other" of the Persian people.[4]

The lines from *Black Shroud* I would like to cite describe the important moment when the narrator in ʿEshqi's work steps into the ruins of Ctesiphon where the ancient remains of the Sasanian past may be seen. Captivated by the magnificence of the ruins, the narrator contemplates the "woeful" history that had brought that edifice to such detritus. Like a bona fide antiquarian, he investigates the archaeological remains of the Sasanian monument to find an answer for its destruction. In a quatrain redolent of certain type of skepticism we find in poetry attributed to Khayyam, he reports his observations as follows:

I saw the footprints of a barefooted Arab;
I considered the relation of a king's crown to an Arab's foot!
I learned whatever I had to learn about this world!
Anything else I saw afterwards from the heavens I laughed!

Jā-ye pā-ye ʿArab-e berahneh-pāʾi didam,
Nesbat-e tāj-e shah u pā-ye ʿArab sanjidam!
Āncheh bāyast befahmam ze jahān fahmidam!
Baʿd az ān har cheh keh didam ze falak, khandidam![5]

Far from presenting a reasoned discourse, the rhetorical question the speaker asks here intends to persuade us to accept a preconceived superiority he attributes to the Persians and the inferiority he assumes for the Arabs. As I shall explain in the following paragraphs, it is impossible to determine an individual's "ethnicity" from some footprints

[4] My usage of armature in this dissertation is informed by Pastor Bodmer's *The Armature of Conquest: Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589.*

[5] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi's Works with Pictures) ed. Moshir-e Salimi, 211.

he apparently has left behind in the sand. The unabashedly ideological thrust of these utterances leave little room for common sense as they are choose to be driven by bias and preconceived assumptions.

The contrast the narrator posits between the opulent material culture of pre-Islamic Iran and that of the uncouth Arabs provided the underpinnings of the armature of anti-Arab discourse we find in many modern texts. As I shall explain in this dissertation, deploying this assumed contrast became the order of the day especially when the ideology of modern Persian nationalism became rampant in Iran in 1920s and 1930s. This was when Iran's relatively more advanced material culture and especially monumental architecture was used for arriving at hasty conclusions about the supposed superiority of Persian civilization and the purported inferiority of the Arabs because of their uncouth appearance and humble mode of subsistence.

The evolutionary scheme that supported such hierarchies of peoples and cultures was *not only* adopted from the findings of European anthropology.[6] In the earliest narratives of encounter between the Persians and the Arabs that date back to the seventh century, the latter were almost always perceived as inferior and taunted for their uncouth appearance and humble source of subsistence. Tabari's chronicle of early Islamic conquests, *Tārikh al-Rosol va al-Molūk* (History of the Prophets and Kings, 923 CE), registers the details of one such encounter. Here we read that the last Sasanian king,

[6] Throughout this dissertation, I shall rely on McNiven and Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* for insight relating to imbrications of European archaeology and anthropology in certain European colonial endeavors in the nineteenth century.

Yazdgerd III (r. 624-651), reportedly deprecated the Arab envoys he was receiving with the following words:

> I know of no other nation on earth that was more miserable smaller in numbers, and more rancorous than you. We used to entrust the outlying villages with our defense against you, and they were sufficient for the task. […] If it is hardship that has caused you [to move against us], we shall allocate provisions for you in order to increase your prosperity. We shall honor your nobles, we shall provide you with clothing, and we shall appoint for you a king who will treat you gently.[7]

In Tabari's narration, the Persian king's scathing words are corroborated by one of the envoys, Mogherah ibn Shoʿbeh (d. 668-71). Reflecting on the customs he associated with the so-called "Age of Ignorance" or the pre-Islamic *Jāheliyyah* era, Mogherah confessed:

> We used to eat beetles of various sorts, scorpions, and snakes, and we considered this our food. Nothing but the bare earth was our dwelling. We wore only what we spun from the hair of camels and sheep.[8]

Echoes of this early encounter and especially the power dynamic informing the Persian and the Arab's give-and-take may be found in many of the works examined in this dissertation. In the Persianate tradition, perhaps the most well-known reiteration may be found in the *Shāhnāmeh* (1010 CE). For the Parsi tradition, as my examination of contemporary Parsi writer, Boman Desai (b. 1950), shall show in Chapter Four, Tabari's *History of the Prophets and Kings* tends to be a source of inspiration. It is indeed fascinating that the Parsis of India are the living embodiments of Perso-Islamic and

[7] Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, ed. Friedmann, vol. 12, 36.

[8] Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, ed. Friedmann, vol. 12, 37.

European traditions, as their writings register an acute awareness of the two sources of history I named in the previous pages.[9]

Using the trope of confession as *evidence* for authenticating the presumed inferiority of the Arabs always ends up quoting them out of context. For example, in the above quotation, the Arab general's acquiescing to the Persian king was largely a rhetorical gesture meant to stress the Arabs' "ignorance" *before* they converted to Islam. Cast as the "other" of the Islamic era, the customs and beliefs associated with the "Age of Ignorance" are believed to have been subverted by the new religion, Islam. Thus, the Arab general's comments were meant to stress the enlightenment Islam brought to the Arabian Peninsula; and how the Muslim Arabs uplifted themselves from the abominable customs they practiced during that time such as burying alive female infants.[10] Using the Arab general's comments as a "confession" without clarifying the specific context they were used in tends to stall the Arabs in some of the worst moments of their history.

As I mentioned above, investigating Shiʿi *taʿziyeh* performances is important for my study of anti-Arab representation since these performances provided a fertile ground in the Persianate tradition for certain Shiʿi writers to construct a discourse of "othering" for representing anybody they perceived to be an enemy of Shiʿism. Within the parameters of

[9] There is a cornucopia of unexplored evidence in anthologies of first examples of Modern Persian poetry. For example, one account has it that Khosrow I (r. 531-579) comes across an Arab singing poetry at his court. After inquiring about the meaning of his poem (poet was unable to sleep apparently because he was in love) Khosrow I reportedly accused the Arab of "being a thief" for not sleeping during the night. See Rajāʾi, *Poli Miyān-e Sheʿr-e Hejjāʾi va ʿArūzi-ye Farsi* (Bridge between Metric and Quantitative Meter Persian Poetry), xxxiii-iv.

[10] For pre-Islamic "Age of Ignorance," see *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd ed) s.v., "Jāhiliyya."

this discourse, the all-Arab dramatic personae of the narrative of Karbala was divided into two separate categories of "the good Arabs" and "the bad Arabs." This new typology set in motion a complex process in which the Arab "other" was partially appropriated and partially disavowed. As I shall explain in detail in Chapter One, this dual process resulted in Persianization of the "good Arabs", and rejection of the "bad Arabs" as grotesque monstrosities.

In addition to helping us investigate the armature of the discourse of anti-Arab representation, these performances provided a host of characters and certain plot components for the trope of "bad Arabs" in secular Persian literature. The demon (Per. *dīv*), for example, was a favorite character in certain supplementary episodes (called *gūsheh* or "corner") Qajar writers added to the canonical corpus of *taʿziyeh* performances. Inhabiting a liminal existence between Zoroastrian (Persian) and Islamic (Arab) mythologies, the demon was used for creating hilariously comedic episodes when it came to lampooning the perceived "enemies of religion." As it has been pointed out, these episodes "not only satisfied the people [for the entertainment they provided] but also were like a bribe to the *ʿulamā* [Shiʿi clergy] so that they would not stop these performances."[11]

I will argue that these highly popular satirical episodes provided vital topoi for the demonic representation of Arabs in the secular dramatic tradition that grew out of the *taʿziyeh* tradition in Iran in 1920s and 1930s. Sometimes called "desert monster" (*ghūl-e*

[11] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 162. Shiʿi *ʿulamā* were the main enemies of the *taʿziyeh* performances and always asked the Qajar court to give up patronizing their apocryphal content.

biyābūni), the demons tend to be closely related to "the bad Arabs" of *taʿziyeh* performances – both in their "uncouth" and "barefooted" appearance which made them look like "desert-dwellers" as well as in their singing style which was declamatory and disharmonic.[12] These tropes of demonization arguably exerted certain influence on the way ʿEshqi evoked the "footprints of a barefooted Arabs" in the ruins of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon. The sub-humanized spectacle of the "other," as a grotesque and entertaining display, found its way in the institution of modern Persian literature where secular writers like ʿEshqi used it to *reimagine* the Arabs as a ruthless force of destruction.

Mirzādeh ʿEshqi *secularized* the content of foregoing tradition by recasting it in a new form that was based on the findings of sciences of archaeology and racial anthropology. As a result, food, dress and monumental architecture, or material culture in general, continued their lives in the minds of modern Persian writers as stable metonyms for hierarchizing cultures and civilizations. The subhumnaized spectacle of the Arab "other" gained new relevance and authority when it was interpreted as ostensibly scientifically verifiable concept for separating the "savage" Arabs from "civilized" Persians. In Chapter Two, I will try to map the emergence of this secular discourse of "othering" in Mirzādeh ʿEshqi by paying special attention to the ruins of the last Sasanian dynasty at Ctesiphon, which for this writer stood as a relic of Iran's undefeated ancient heritage.

[12] Not all demons or jinns are evil creatures in the repertoire of *taʿziyeh* performances. Zaʿfar-e Jenni, a king of Muslim jinns, is believed to have been killed at the battle of Karbala while helping Imam Hosein. See *Encyclopedia of Iranica*, s.v. "Genie" (Omidsālār). The trope of evil demon originates from satirical content of *taʿziyeh* performances.

Picture 1: Picture of "demon" in *Binding the Demon's Toes*

The intertextual continuity that informs the emergence and consolidation of this discourse of anti-Arab representation both in the Persianate and Parsi traditions may be dissected into certain moments in time. These moments either were overdetermined by particular historical circumstances – like Mirzādeh ʿEshqi visiting Ctesiphon in 1916 while fleeing an imminent Russian invasion – or were shaped by the *zeitgeist* of particular eras – like Boman Desai demystifying the role of Arabs and Islam in Parsis' forced immigration to India. Accretion of layers has created a *palimpsestic* quality for this discourse and the manner representations of Arabs have been constructed in it. As I shall argue in this dissertation, modern recrudescence of anti-Arab representation in the literary traditions examined here was inspired and thus framed by what modern writers discovered in their predecessors. Mobilizing what later writers found in classical or legacy texts, such as the historical section of the *Shāhnāmeh* and Tabari's history, has lent authority and an aura of authenticity to newly discovered tropes in modern texts like those deriving from racial anthropology. Recrudescence of tropes and discourses throughout the time tends to point to an intertextual conversation that gave a new currency to the content of legacy texts, canonizing them as hegemonic reservoirs of ideological and rhetorical capital in their respective traditions. In the works of modern writers such as Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951), or in the literature of the Parsis of India, age-old concepts stand side-by-side tropes and discourses they borrowed from European (colonial) literature. Therefore, the moments I evoke in this dissertation not only embody patterns and connections that animate the comparative landscape I investigate, but also demonstrate the polyphony of voices that has characterized the Persianate literature in its trans-regional reach.

Antiquarianism and Reclamation of Ancient Past

Before I continue examining the role modern figures such as Sadeq Hedayat played in giving a new currency to anti-Arab representations, it is crucial that we examine the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran in the latter half of the nineteenth century since it was within an antiquarian discourse that the Arabs were imagined in some works of modern Persianate literature as "savage" destroyers of Iran's ancient archaeological monuments. Investigating the development of antiquarianism in Iran – an important topic that has received little attention so far – is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, in order to appreciate the dynamics of ʿEshqi's antiquarian imagination, and more importantly, how the Arabs to him were irreducibly tied to the destruction they wreaked on his country's ancient monuments, we need to examine briefly the emergence of antiquarianism, or what in Persian is generally known as *bāstāngerāʾī* (*bāstān* [ancient] + *gerāʾī* [inclination]).[13]

Antiquarianism is generally understood as preoccupation with the material heritage of the ancient past. The field's non-professional assumptions predate the emergence of scientific discipline of modern archaeology. For this reason, antiquarianism is usually defined in a somewhat negative light as "an admixture of nostalgia for a vanished past and a growing ideological commitment to progress," giving incentive to the antiquarian

[13] A limited lexicon is used in Persian for expressing preoccupations with the past. The Persian word *bāstān* is an equivalent of *ʿatīq*, a word commonly used in Arabic historical and geographical texts referring to the ancient past. The word *bāstāngerāʾī* is a relatively recent coinage signifying an "inclination" toward anything ancient.

to focus on the "remnants of the past – documentary, material, behavioral, or ideational indices of past ways of life – in an effort to construct and comprehend a contrastive present."[14] The recuperative ambitions of such endeavors not only manifested themselves in the antiquaries' much-ridiculed obsession with ancient material culture, or the objects they collected over time; restoring the past was also practiced in writing as rhetorical aspects of antiquarian inquiries were viewed with equal importance. The antiquarian "conceived of himself as bridging the gap between past and present, affording 'olden time' presence so that it might speak to or inform the current time."[15]

ʿEshqi's representing the Arabs as the "other" at Ctesiphon ruins (in the passage discussed above) was in many ways the result of projecting onto them the worst archaeological practices we can find in Iran in the past century or so. Such an act of projection may be linked to the efforts of certain colonial elites in the Indo-Persian community of India. The Zoroastrian diaspora of Mumbai, known as the Parsis, left behind a lasting legacy in fostering the absorption of sciences of archaeology and anthropology in the elite discourses of history and literature in Iran; discourses that became key sites for authenticating the status of Arabs as the "other" of the Persian people. As I explain in Chapter Four, the idea of Parsis returning to their ancestral homeland in 1920s and 1930s created intense intellectual activity in Iran, helping the

[14] Bauman and Briggs, *Voices of Modernity*, 72.

[15] Vine, *In Defiance of Time*, 5.

incipient nation to construct its modern image in contradistinction to the Arabs that were cast as the "others" of the Persian people.[16]

Manekji Limji Hataria (1813-1890), the Parsi emissary that was sent from Mumbai to Iran by the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of Zoroastrians in Persia plays a key role here. His account of his travels in Iran, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān* (Essay on Description of a Travel to Iran, 1865), contains crucial examples where he systematically projects onto "the Arabs" the very practices he identified among contemporary Persians. Through these projections, Hataria created an imaginary entity called "the Arabs" so that he could blame them for the neglect he found in Iran in regards to the country's antiquities.

The journey this Parsi emissary made to Iran appears to have activated a *narrative of reclamation* of Iran's pre-Islamic past. As we learn from his writings, Hataria made a claim on the Zoroastrian origins of Iran's ancient heritage; something he believed Muslim historians had deliberately put under erasure. In addition to this, Hataria allegorized Iran's pre-Islamic heritage as an idealized past that was hopelessly buried under layers of Islamic sedimentation. In 1920s and 1930s, at the height of modern Persian nationalism, this narrative of decline found ample echoes in the repertoire of nationalist texts. Even

[16] Iran's new monarch, Reza Shah, encouraged the Parsis of India to return to Iran. In 1932, he sent a welcome message to them that started with this sentence: "You Parsis are as much the children of this soil as any other Iranis, and so you are as much entitled to have your proper share in its development as any other nationals." See Hekmat, *Parsis of India: Their Past and Present.*

today, Mirzā Āqā Khān Kermāni's ideas about this narrative of decline is still uncontested and popularly used for invoking the glories of Iran's pre-Islamic past.

Preoccupation with archaeological remains as a source of inspiration for visual recreation of the past tends to go back several centuries in Persian literary tradition. The *qasideh* (ode) that celebrated medieval poet, Khāqāni Shervāni (1121-90), composed about the ruins of the last Sasanian dynasty at Ctesiphon has enjoyed great afterlife in an array of texts dealing with those remains in Iran.[17] This legacy came to a culmination in Mirzādeh ʿEshqi and Sadeq Hedayat's ardent love for their country's archaeological monuments, which were transformed into metonyms of Iran's ancient glories by the archaic ideology of modern Persian nationalism. The romantic sentiments ʿEshqi uttered about the detritus at Ctesiphon in 1916 may be understood as a modern writer recasting himself as a living Khāqāni and refashioning his love for his country's ancient monuments as timeless antiquarian preoccupations like those of Khāqāni.

The Persian travelers who visited Europe in the nineteenth century harbingered a type of literary modernity in Iran by cultivating novel art forms such as opera in their indigenous culture. In their travel narratives, we find a cornucopia of evidence about their exposure to novel art forms, particularly spectacular theatre and opera that was very popular during the time they visited Europe. As I explain in Chapter One, introduction of

[17] Khāqāni visited Ctesiphon twice, both on his way to Mecca. His first description of the ruins of the Sasanian palace is only four lines long. See Khāqāni, *Divān* (ed. Sajjādi), 95. His second visit is believed to have inspired him with the ode he is mostly known for today. See Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* and Browne, *Literary History of Persia* for general discussions of Khāqāni in English.

comedic content in the otherwise tragic performances of the mourning month of Moharram may be attributed to the "taste for spectacle" these travelers fostered in Iran. Unfortunately, the Persian travelers are not as interested in or perhaps vocal about the antiquarian and/or archaeological practices they observed during their stays in Europe. They record in detail their fascination with the "spectacular reality" that surrounded them in London and Paris. However, they provide little information about archaeological exhibitions or displays of ancient artefacts in European museums so that we could assess their exposure to antiquarianism in the nineteenth century. The two examples I have been able to identify so far tend to belong to early stages of the process I shall identify in the following pages.[18]

The first example I would like to cite here comes from an early nineteenth-century travelogue titled *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders, 1809). The writer of this text was a Persian diplomat by the name of Mirza Abu ul-Hasan Īlchi (1780–1860) who was accompanied during his 1808 visit to Britain by the young James Morier who served as his guide. (For more on Morier see the flowing pages.) In addition to giving us useful descriptions of nineteenth century spectacular theatre and opera – examined in detail in Chapter One – the never-ending carnival of curiosities Īlchi witnessed in Britain includes one of the earliest reports by a Persian traveler about displays of Iran's archaeological remains in Europe. Invited to a masque, or what he calls *raqs-e pari-vashān* ("dance of

[18] Due to paucity of information on this topic, any conclusion in this regard shall be conjectural until an extensive examination of the travelogues that were written during the nineteenth century could shed more light on the dynamics of exposure and reception I identify here.

fairies"), Īlchi recounts how in the home of a rich family in London he came across certain artefacts belonging to ancient Iran:

> They had lit a garden with many lanterns. Lamps were hanging from trees and an enormous tent was erected for dancing at the middle of that garden. Every sort of flower was decorating the house and the garden. Pictures of Persepolis (*sūrat-e Takht-e Jamshid*) […] and the pivot of the universe (*qebleh-ye ʿālam*) [the Persian king] were hanging in that tent along with a picture of their king on some cushion.[19]

Although Īlchi's taking note of Persepolis imagery tends to reveal a degree of awareness on his side about Persian antiquities, yet the fact that he does not express any particular fondness for them may also be deemed as evidence for absence of nationalistic sentiments in this particular observer. As we shall see in the case of Mirzādeh ʿEshqi, romantic love for Iran's antiquities became an irreducible element of the nationalist ethos in early twentieth century. To Īlchi, "a picture of Persepolis" appeared to be merely a spectacle among many others he discovered in London. This trace of early exposure is important since the Persianate elites appear to have learned the rites of antiquarianism from Europeans, who developed this field of inquiry during the Renaissance era.[20]

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[19] Īlchi, *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders) ed. Morsalvand, 325. According to the editor, a word is missing after Persepolis is mentioned in Īlchi's travelogue. In MS no. 9921 at the Library of Iranian Parliament, the word Persepolis is followed by a space in the text.

[20] The history and development of antiquarianism in Europe and Britain has been the subject of several surveys. For example, see Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 40-120; Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians, and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886*; Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain*; Schnapp, *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Representatives.*

Nearly half a century later, we still see Persian travelers gazing at exhibitions of ancient Persian artefacts in European cities without questioning the manner in which they were taken there or what such artefacts might mean for the archaeology of their own country. The well-known Persian traveler and thinker, Mirzā Mohammad ʿAli Mahallāti, better known as Hāji Sayyāh (*c.* 1836-1925), gives us another report about ancient Persian artefacts being displayed again in London. His observations can be found in *Safarnāmeh-ye Hāji Sayyāh* (The Travelogue of Hāji Sayyāh, 1860) which recounts the traveler's experiences in his many trips to Europe and America. Visiting a museum, the traveler is stunned by the spectacular displays he finds there:

> In the cellar there were statues (*sovar-e mojassameh*) from Egypt and other places, which Napoleon had brought back after his victories. There were also various [exotic] works (*sovar-e gharibeh va ʿajībeh*) from all over the world. I saw pieces of the carved stones of Persepolis too [that were displayed beautifully]. There were also pieces from the throne of Sulaimān and from Baalbek.[21]

Similar to Īlchi, Hāji Sayyāh's somewhat impassive observation does not frame the artefacts in the romantic discourse ʿEshqi utilized in 1921 for capturing "the grandeur of Iran's past and this country's robust civilization" that he believed was buried at the ruins of Ctesiphon.[22] Nearly two decades later, Hāji Sayyāh found an opportunity to visit Persepolis for a second time in 1877. The urgency imbuing his second visit can give us an idea about how attending to Iran's antiquities was pursued more earnestly by certain

[21] Hāji Sayyāh, *An Iranian in Nineteenth Century Europe* (trans. Nasser Deyhim), 149. For the Persian, see *Safar-nāmeh-ye Hāji Sayyāh* (Travelogue of Hāji Sayyāh) ed. Dehbāshi, 199.

[22] Kūhestāni-nezhād, *Gozideh-ye Asnād-e Namāyesh* (A Selection of Theatre Documents), vol. 2, 63.

Persian intellectuals in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Hāji Sayyāh visited Persepolis for the express purpose of making sure its remains were protected:

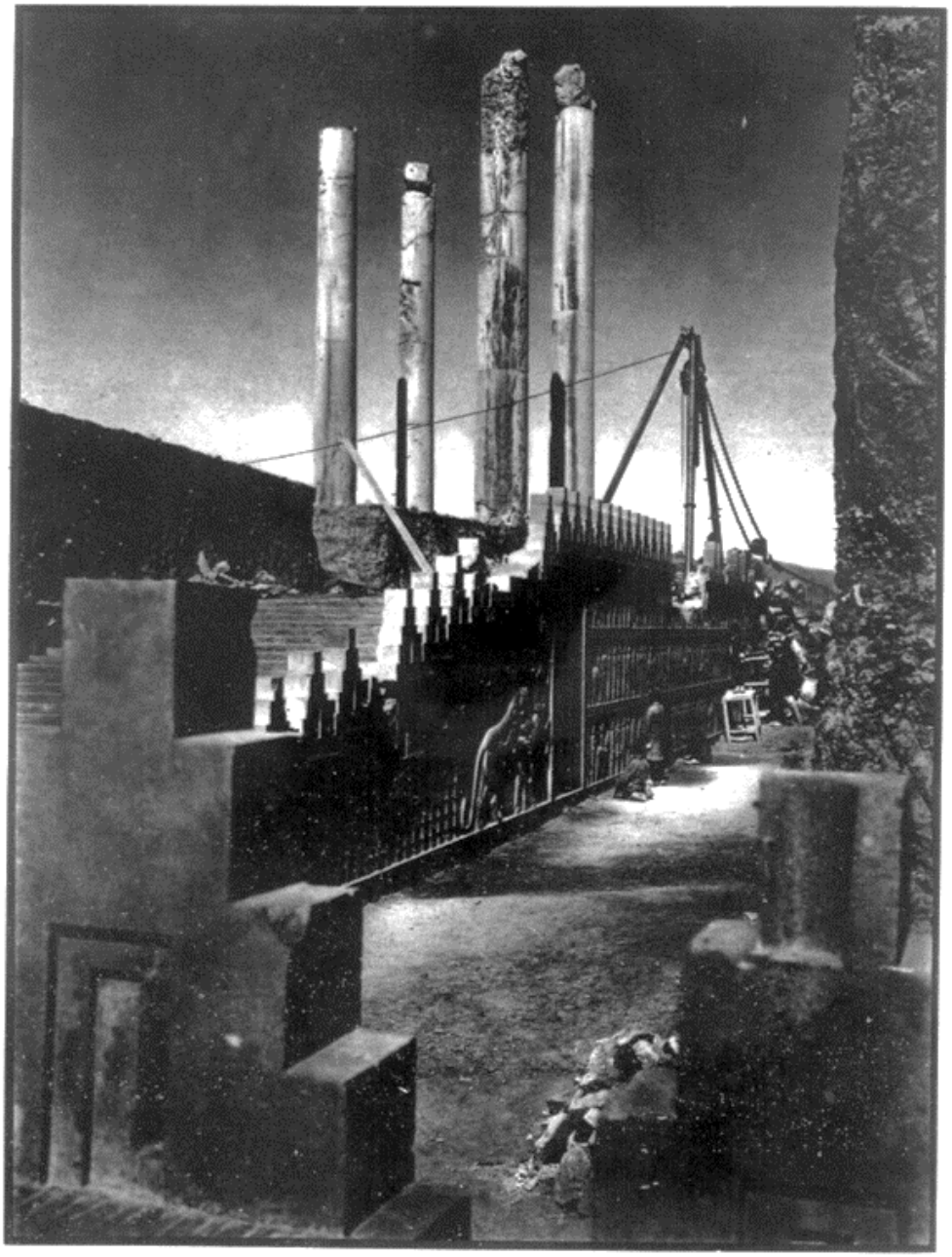
> I asked a carrier to take me to Persepolis. I told him: "I have been there but was told that Moʿtamed ud-Dowleh has done some repairs there that I want to see." He accepted. We departed early next day and [once there] settled under the shades of a tree. I took a person with me to visit Persepolis. I saw that it was in the same condition I had seen it nineteen years ago. Some areas were dug up. A soldier was stationed there as well. People who visit Persepolis help him out. It made me very sad that a place like this is left unprotected (*bi-sāheb*) and everybody has carved names on its bas-reliefs. If they had kept this place in a good condition, people from all over the world would have come to visit it. This would have been a source of income for the government as well as the local people.[23]

Hāji Sayyāh's regret when he finds out that Persepolis' derelict condition has not improved may be considered a step forward from the nonchalant observation he made about the Persian artefacts in the exhibition in London. His wish to protect the ancient site – signs of looting attract his attention – and to turn it into a museum (*barā-ye siyāhat*) so that it may be watched by all, tend to presage the sentiments writers like Mirzādeh ʿEshqi would espouse in a few decades. As I shall explain in Chapter Two, under the aegis of modern Persian nationalism, protecting Iran's ancient monuments became a national duty for every Iranian. This was when archaeological activities at sites

[23] Haji Sayyāh, *Khāterāt-e Haji Sayyāh* (Memoirs of Haj Sayyāh) ed. Iraj Afshār, 27-8. Moʿtamed ud-Dowleh (1818-1888) was a Qajar prince-governor, author and bibliophile. He was the governor of Fars (1876-81) during the time Haji Sayyāh visited Persepolis. See *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Farhād Mīrzā Moʿtamad-al-Dawla."

THE GREAT PERSEPOLIS DISCOVERIES: ONE OF THE ROYAL STAIRWAYS.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ORIENTAL INSTITUTE EXPEDITION TO PERSIA UNDER PROFESSOR ERNST HERZFELD. BY COURTESY OF PROFESSOR J. H. BREASTED, DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE.



THE NEWLY DISCOVERED STAIRWAY IN FRONT OF THE APADANA, OR AUDIENCE HALL OF DARIUS, AT PERSEPOLIS: A VIEW SHOWING SOME OF THE 65-FT. COLUMNS, AND A HOISTING TRIPOD FOR REPLACING FALLEN FRAGMENTS.

Here we see the monumental stairway recently discovered at Persepolis (and illustrated on the two preceding pages) in its relation to the Apadana, or Audience Hall of the Persian Kings, to which it formed a stately approach. Four of the huge columns of the hall, 65 ft. high, appear in the background. A more general view of the ruins, with other columns that survived earthquakes in antiquity, is given on page 406, along with Professor Herzfeld's article describing his discoveries. The above photograph shows the south wing of the stairway with the reliefs representing a tribute procession from twenty-eight nations subject to the Great King. In the right background is the hoisting tripod which was used by the excavators to lift back into their position many of the sculptured blocks that had fallen to the ground. In the left background is a gap in the parapet caused by the fall of a high wall.

Picture 2: Herzfeld's article on latest discoveries at Persepolis
The Illustrated London News (March 25, 1933)

such as the Persepolis gained substantial media coverage, turning the fleshly excavated ruins a national as well as international sensation.[24]

As a recent study shows, an exponential increase occurred in 1920s and 1930s in the number of news pieces published in Iran that reported on the country's archaeological activities. This increase arguably transformed the way Iranians looked at their country's monuments and transformed them into relics of a national past. With increasing regularity, these news pieces informed the readers about various activities ranging from reports on excavations and significant finds to indictment of looters and establishment of national museums.[25] In well-known newspapers such as *Habl ul-Matin*, editorial pieces disciplined the readers in the sanctity of Iran's archaeological heritage. For example, in a report on looting some artefacts in March 1925, the objective reportage of the incident was routinely interrupted to accommodate editorial reflections on how the material remains of the ancient past "were extremely beneficial for Iran" and how they "must be stored at the country's [national] museum."[26] Cherishing the relics of the past glories,

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[24] Excavations at Persepolis received ample attention both inside and outside of Iran. For example, see Herzfeld's beautifully illustrated article on latest findings at Persepolis published in *The Illustrated London News* (March 1933).

[25] Up to ten different thematic typologies have been identified for the coverage of archaeological activities in Iran in the early decades of the twentieth century. See Zādeh-dabbāgh, et al., "Sahm-e Bāstānshenāsi-ye Iran dar Matbūʿāt: 1295-1316" (The Share of Archaeology in Persian Press: 1916-1937), 49-136 for summaries of these news types.

[26] See *Habl ul-Matin* (March 13, 1925), 18. The artefacts that were extracted from these sites were displayed in Iran's first National Museum (*Mūzeh-ye Melli-ye Iran*) which was established in March 1917. For the first National Museum in Iran, see Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Archaeology and the Iranian National Museum."

now recognized as national artefacts and monuments, and learning how to safeguard them, were some of the ways the readers could perform the nationalist identity these publications prescribed for them.

Another source of information for investigating the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran is the travelogues of Europeans who visited the country in the nineteenth century. The vignettes we find in these works can help us reconstruct the milieu through which the people in Iran as well as certain Persian elites related to their country's pre-Islamic antiquities as cherished relics of an ancient heritage. The rhetoric these travelogues use more often than not reveals a sense of superiority similar to what Edward Said has identified in the so-called Orientalist literature. Reading texts by writers such as James Morier (1780-1849) against the grain of their Orientalist rhetoric, this body of literature can provide useful information concerning the emergence and the milieu of reception of antiquarianism in Iran during the time the local writers rarely touched on these topics.

In the past decades and under the influence of postcolonial studies, some scholars have started to reassess the development of the discipline of archaeology in ancient regions such as Mesopotamia to be "in step with" Western colonial enterprises in the Near East.[31] The role certain archaeologists or the antiquarians before them played in the consolidation of Western hegemony over certain Near Eastern countries have been described as "instrumental to imperial advancements" in that part of the world.[32] In these revisionist studies, "colonial European investigations into the past and present" of Near

[31] Lydon and Rizvi, "Introduction: Postcolonialism and Archaeology," 18.

[32] Mourad, "An Ethical Archaeology in the Near East," 154.

Eastern countries are criticized for being "fundamentally shaped by the exigencies of rationalizing and maintaining [European] power" over them.[33]

Although it has never been officially colonized, yet a similar trend arguably may be identified in Iran as well. The history of excavations in this country was dominated by diplomats and/or military affiliates of European imperial powers who conducted exploratory and reconnaissance expeditions resulting in the discovery and displacement of a significant number of archaeological artefacts. It has been observed that Europeans conducted these expeditions by systematically imposing capitulations on weak Persian governments to obtain exclusive excavation rights.[34] Historically speaking, Iran has always been a preferred destination for archaeological expeditions in the Near East.[35] The vast panorama of antiquarian activities in Iran in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is populated by high profile antiquarians and treasure-hunters such as Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) and James Morier (1782-1849) whose discoveries and damages are studied by many.[36] After considering the history of European archaeological activities in

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[33] Gullapalli, "Heterogeneous Encounters: Colonial Histories and Archaeological Experiences," 36.

[34] Yazdāni, *Asnād-e Hei'at-hā-ye Bāstānshenāsi dar Iran* (Documents of Archaeological Expeditions in Iran), xi-xii.

[35] For a history of European archaeological activities in Iran, see relevant chapters in Errington et al., *From Persepolis to the Punjab: Exploring Ancient Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan*. European expeditions centering on Persepolis are surveyed in Mousavi, *Persepolis Discovery and Afterlife of a World Wonder*, especially Chapter Five. A comprehensive history of archaeology in Iran still needs to be compiled in Persian.

[36] Layard's excavations in Mesopotamia especially at the Assyrian sites of Nimrud and Nineveh were celebrated for their spectacular findings. Layard visited Susa in Iran trying to determine if it was the Biblical Susan. See *Encyclopedia of Iranica*, s.v. "Austen Henry Layard." James Morier is the

Iran, it may be argued that archaeology in this country appears to act as a "stepchild of imperialism" since Western archaeological expeditions in the Near East arguably almost always were tied to French, British and American attempts at territorial control over countries like Egypt and Iraq.[37]

A pertinent example of imbrication of archaeology in colonial endeavors in Iran may be found in *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor* (1818), a well-received travelogue by the British diplomat, antiquarian and treasure hunter, James Morier (1782-1849). The potential obliviousness this writer observed among the Persians toward their country's ancient heritage is of particular importance for any study of the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran in the nineteenth century. His condescending outlook toward the Persians for their presumed "failure" partially may be read as veiled attempts at self-praise because the more indigenous people in countries like Iran are oblivious to the role of their ancient heritage in their nation's history, the more he is justified in making a claim on their antiquities. By establishing his authority as the sole possessor of knowledge about Iran's archaeology, Morier could legitimize dispossessing the natives from their ancient heritage.[38] The encounters and interactions that travelers

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author of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824), known for its Orientalist representations of Iranians.

[37] For Near Eastern archaeology as "the stepchild of imperialism" or as an apparatus for producing knowledge about the so-called "Orientals," see Cooper, "From Mosul to Manila: Early Approaches to Funding Ancient Near Eastern Studies Research in the United States," 133.

[38] Morier infamously explained in his travelogue that he "did not hesitate to appropriate [large pieces of masonry at Persepolis] as seemed the most fitting to be sent to England." See Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 75. As Chahryar Adle has noted, Morier "did not ask himself whether, under the ethical or legal standards prevailing at the time in

such as Morier describe in their travelogues oftentimes end up rehearsing a limited cast of characters. Like many Orientalist texts, the political theatre that is staged in this work can help us investigate the roots of the colonial discourse of "othering" he mobilized for constructing binary opposites that pit the Europeans against the indigenous people in Iran.

By reading between the lines of the interactions Morier had with the natives while he was engaged in this notorious process of cultural appropriation, we can have a glimpse at the status of antiquities in the Persian culture during this time. Perhaps not surprisingly, he always found the Persians in a state of awe and amazement when he informed them about his interest in Persian antiquities. For example, the chief of the ancient area of Shāpūr, according to Morier, "seemed quite astonished that we should take such great interest in inspecting ruins and sculptured rocks."[39] The Persian ambassador in India appears to be consumed by similar amazement at a Buddhist cave temple Morier happens to visit. After enjoying breakfast at the ancient temple, Morier notices that the Persian ambassador is scrutinizing the site as well. The British diplomat's description of this encounter relies on the "*positional* superiority" Said has identified in the repertoire of Orientalist texts.[40] Morier's relationship with the Persians indeed is always from the above, preserving the upper hand for himself:

> The first thing we perceived on entering the great cave was the Persian Ambassador, with a most serious and collected air, pacing its length with all the

Persia, or even in England, the very removal of a work of art without a legal permission was a reprehensible deed." See Adle, "Khorheh: The Dawn of Iranian Scientific Excavation," 259.

[39] Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 51.

[40] Said, *Orientalism*, 7. Emphasis in original.

> gravity of an antiquary, whilst his companion, a Persian merchant, whose calculations never went beyond the profits of his goods, was observing him in great astonishment. He seemed quite wrapped up in wonder at what he saw, and said that the ruins of Persepolis were not to be compared to it. He could only have caught this spirit of investigation from us, for before he left Persia he used to ridicule the pains which we took in the search for antiquities […].[41]

The Persian ambassador appears to be conscious of the antiquity of this particular site and even compares it with another ancient site, the Persepolis. Nevertheless, his interest in antiquities is not enough to deter the British diplomat's dismissive attitude toward him. To Morier, the Persian antiquarian (if he may be called so) was wrapped in such "wonder" that left no clue for him to measure the site's "real" archaeological value – something the British diplomat preserved for himself as an antiquarian. As I mentioned previously, by representing "Orientals" such as the Persian ambassador as ignorant "others" Europeans like Morier could establish their hegemonic position as possessors of knowledge about countries like Iran.

The Persian ambassador is portrayed with certain degree of favor in the quoted passage since he is elevated over the merchant (his foil) who represents the stereotypically gullible "Oriental." The writer's favorable outlook was in part because in an earlier meeting he had praised the ambassador for expressing "gratitude for the kindness which he had received during his stay among us, and his enthusiastic admiration of England."[42] Given the early date of this observation (1818), the Persian ambassador appears to be among the first Persians who were exposed to the rites of

[41] Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 23.

[42] Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 18.

antiquarianism in Europe in the nineteenth century. Unable to comprehend the fact that the Persian ambassador may also possess some knowledge about antiquities, Morier casts him as a mere *imitator* of the British master, pretending to be an antiquarian only in appearance.[43] The merchant's seeming "astonishment" furthermore can be an indication of the novelty of the ambassador's new avocation, or the "spirit of investigation" he acquired in Britain.

A few months later, this crescendo of sarcasm and condescension came to a culmination in an encounter Morier had with a shepherd that was grazing his cattle within the Persepolis ruins. Astonished by the pride he found in his unlikely visitor, the British antiquary decided to focus on the "technology" of antiquarian exploration in order to undermine the agency of the local shepherd. Doing so could help him reestablish his superiority as the person in charge:

> The mountains which surround the site of these ruins have a repelling dreariness that is not to be described; yet on meeting one morning a shepherd whose goats were scattered about the ruins, I could not help being struck with the air of superiority which he put on, when he asked me, "Have you any thing like this in your country?" This, indeed, was a very common question put to us by the natives whenever they met us busily employed in examining what had never attracted their attention.[44]

[43] Morier's bitter reaction may be analyzed through Homi Bhabha's theory of *mimicry* that informs the colonizer-colonized relationship. According to this theory, the mimicry that is performed by the colonized (the Persian ambassador, in this case) tends to "menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" in the colonizer (Morier). See Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 88.

[44] Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor*, 66.

I would like to argue that the foregoing meeting represents an encounter between two worldviews when we speak of antiquities in Iran in the nineteenth century. Insight about the two figures involved in this encounter, the setting that has brought them together, and especially the power dynamic informing their relationship can shed light on the cast of characters we find in modern Persianate literature when we speak about Arabs and their role as destroyers of Iran's ancient glories. On the one hand, we have a so-called "Oriental" failing to protect an important archaeological site by letting his cattle desecrate it by grazing in it. The shepherd's purported failure, Morier believed, delegitimized his claim on the site, giving him only an "air of superiority" when he spoke about it. Yet, despite Morier's belief, the shepherd appears to be aware of this particular site's magnificence – if not its antiquity. It may even be argued that the shepherd claims ownership over the ruins particularly when he taunts the British traveler to speak of something similar in his own country.

The shepherd's silent interlocutor, on the other hand, is a European Orientalist engaged in the "sophisticated" business of antiquarian exploration in a distant land called Iran. The presumed science his endeavor, and the fact that he was among the few Europeans who had visited Persepolis so far, confers an unshakable sense of superiority on him as the conqueror of a virgin land waiting to be opened by him. The "technology" of antiquarian investigation Morier brought to Iran arguably manufactured the "criminal" indifference he identified in the Persian "other" in regards to his country's ancient heritage. Like many colonial writers, Morier arrived at these conclusions by suppressing "very common" sentiments among the natives. For reasons such as these, Morier has been

blamed for representing an "overt instance of the intimate relationship between Romantic rhetoric and empire building."[45]

Arabs Projected within an Antiquarian Discourse

Previously I argued that Arabs in modern Persian literature are imagined within an antiquarian discourse that casts them as "savage" destroyers of Iran's ancient glories. ʿEshqi's transplanting "barefooted" Arabs in the ruins of Ctesiphon may be considered a watershed moment in this regard since this writer's imaginary encounter with the Arab "other" was overdetermined by the underpinnings of the antiquarian discourse I described in the previous pages. Such a vision recasts the Arabs as destructive "others" in what has come to be known as the *narrative of decline* of the Persian Empire. As we learn from Neil Silberman's typology of historical narratives,

> the rise and fall of the great ancient Near Eastern empires, as discovered and elaborated by modern European antiquarians and archaeologists, was told as a narrative of steady progress toward a Golden Age of social complexity and monumental building and then a long decline in which the monuments became ruins and the great kingdoms disappeared.[46]

Nineteenth-century Persian intellectuals such as Ākhondzādeh and Kermāni were profoundly preoccupied with this narrative as they tried to re-appropriate the glories of their country's ancient past in an effort to rise above their present inglorious reality. One

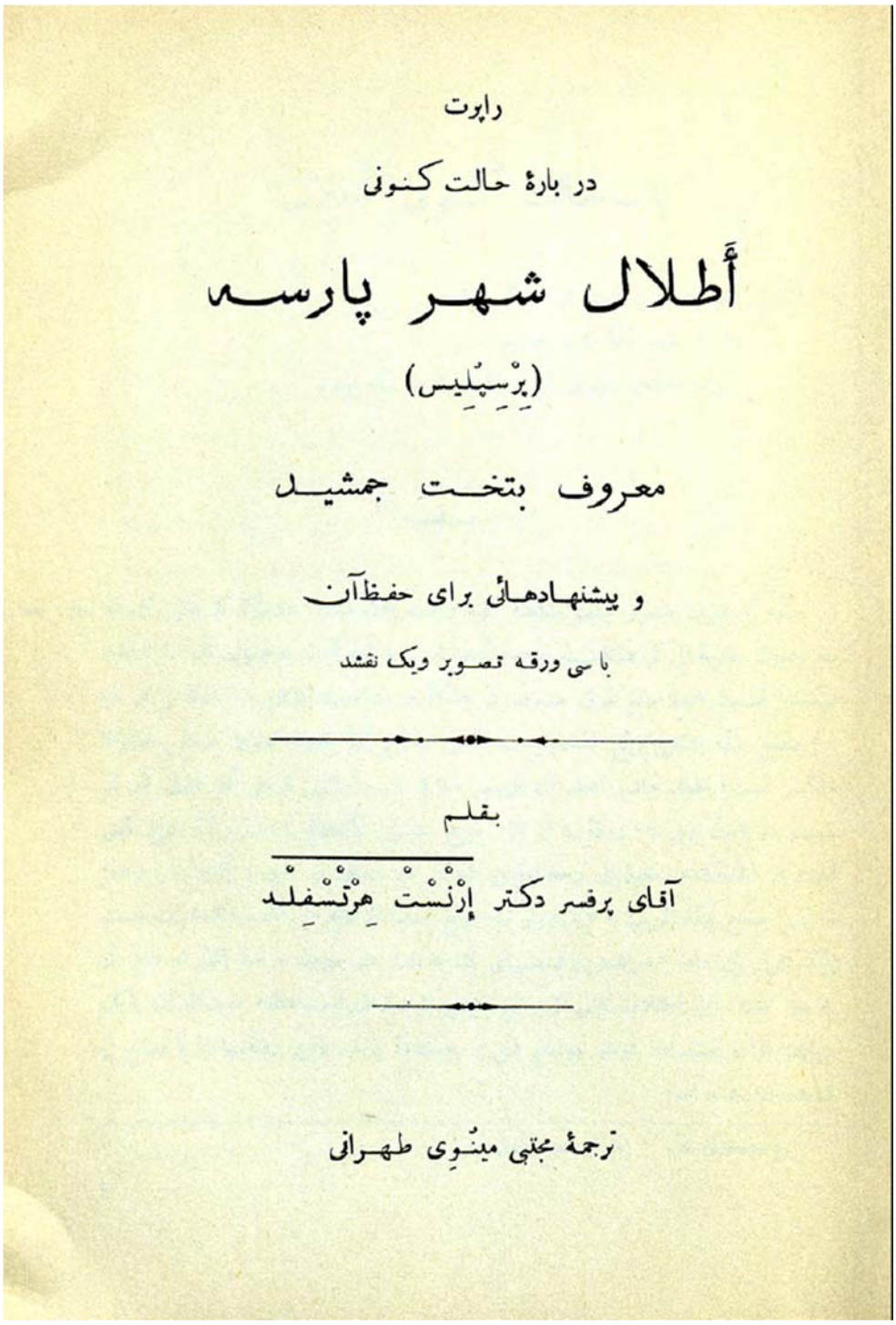
[45] Mazzeo, *Travels, Explorations and Empires*, vol. 4, 154.

[46] Silberman, "The Tyranny of Narrative: History, Heritage, and Hatred in the Modern Middle East," 180.

way to fulfill these desires was to re-emplot the history of Iran. In the new narrative that emerged, the Arabs were recast in Persian history as the adversaries that stifled Iran's movement toward *poroghreh* (progress) and *sivilāziāsiūn* (civilization). As a result of this "narrative recoding," the Arabs were vilified as the abominable people who terminated the ancient golden age of Iran, ushering an era of "barbarity and savagery and ignorance" (*barbariyyat va vahshiyyat va jehālat*), to quote Mirzā Fath ʿAli Ākhondzādeh (1812-1878), a pioneering Persian intellectual.[47]

As I try to demonstrate in Chapter Three, the introduction of Arabs in this narrative of decline found a strong resonance in the works of several modern writers such as Sadeq Hedayat. In fact, this particular writer became so profoundly preoccupied with the foregoing narrative that "barefooted" marauding Arabs cast a lasting shadow over an important number of his works. Hedayat turned ʿEshqi's fantasies into a political theatre where the Arabs' assumed inferiority gave impetus to disparaging assumptions about their material culture, especially food and dress, as well as their purported racial impurity as "degenerate" Semites. The tropes and discourses Hedayat meticulously assembled in his works in order to mount his rhetorical war against the Arabs have turned him into one of the most radical purveyors of anti-Arab writing in modern Persian literature. Perhaps it would not be an overstatement to say that it was largely because of his unwavering dedication and exceptional talent that preoccupation with the Arab "other" became an irreducible part of the intellectual milieu of modern Persian literature in 1930s

[47] For "narrative recoding," see Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 101. The quoted phrase is from Ākhondzādeh, *Maktūbāt* (Epistles), 228.



راپورت

در بارهٔ حالت کنونی

أطلال شهر پارسه

(پرسپلیس)

معروف بتخت جمشید

و پیشنهادهائی برای حفظ آن

با سی ورقه تصویر ویک نقشه

بقلم

آقای پرفسر دکتر إرنست هرتسفلد

ترجمهٔ مجتبی مینوی طهرانی

Picture 3: one of the earliest publications in Persian about Persepolis. Minovi's translation of Herzfeld's archaeological monograph (1928)

and afterwards. With the help of his circle of friends such as Bozorg Alavi (1904-1997), he translated his monstrous vision about the Arabs into a language of popular appeal that maximized the circulation of his sentiments among his readers and followers.

Investigating Hedayat's reception of archaeology and especially the antiquarian discourse I described above can help us understand how the representations of Arabs were discursively constructed in his works. The antiquarians and/or archaeologists that populate his stories are sometimes based on historical figures, and sometimes adopted from early Hollywood cinema. These characters reveal the writer's knowledge about excavations done in Iran by European explorers like Eugène Flandin and Pascal-Xavier Coste who visited the country in 1839-41. In his stories, the archaeologists are on the brink of uncovering spectacular aspects of Iran's pre-Islamic civilization. The wonder they feel and the fascination they express is like a stamp of approval for Hedayat, conferring an aura of authenticity on anything pre-Islamic for him.

The antiquarian activities he depicts in his stories can help us understand how he personally performed similar practices in Iran, rehearsing an emergent identity he borrowed from European traveler-explorers. By doing so, Hedayat could arrogate to himself the authority we found in figures like James Morier whose authoritative gaze over the Persian terrain I examined in the previous pages. As I argue in Chapter Three, Hedayat's antiquarian imagination stalled the Arabs in panoramic spectacles similar to what Edward Said has described in the so-called Orientalist literature. This was partly because of this writer's uncritical appropriation of a particularly Eurocentric brand of antiquarian imagination, which let him identify with a European vision of Iran that was in awe of its pre-Islamic heritage. Moreover, this archaeological imagination let him

appropriate the ideological hierarchies he discovered in certain European colonial works in order to classify the Arabs in racial terms as "savages" attacking a superior civilization.

Following the footsteps of writers such as Mirzādeh ʿEshqi, Hedayat's early travel narrative, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" ("Isfahan, Half of the World," 1932), may be understood as perpetuating a European antiquarian legacy because it let him perform the elite activities certain European antiquaries had performed in Iran. The journey he made through central Iran in order to get to the historical city of Isfahan gave him ample opportunities to visit a number of monuments and historical locations. Roaming the landscape of the Persian territory, Hedayat reflected on the architecture, construction date and state of preservation of everything he visited. And like his European counterparts, he engaged the locals to learn about the stories that wrapped those monuments in an aura of myth and supernatural powers.

The last monument Hedayat describes in his travelogue is an ancient Zoroastrian fire temple near Isfahan. In contrast to the detachment and ambivalence he felt toward Islamic monuments, his attention to the Zoroastrian monument reveals profound love and affection. He saw the ruined but still-standing edifice of the Zoroastrian fire temple as an epitome of Iran's bravely surviving the so-called Islamic onslaught of the seventh century. Investing the ancient fire temple with great symbolic value, Hedayat contemplated how its holy fire must have been a beacon of hope for the lonely in ancient times. Enchanted by these romantic recollections, he proceeded to rekindle that ancient fire symbolically by "cutting up a page from a newspaper and setting it on fire on the temple's altar." The results were beautiful but fleeting: "It flamed up and was quickly

turned into ashes."[48] Reviving the everlasting fire of Zoroastrianism captured the imagination of Hedayat and many of his contemporaries as it permeated the *zeitgeist* of modern Iran like a sublime dream. Echoes of this episode may be heard throughout this writer's career in tales of archaeological discovery that (symbolically) rekindle the fire of Zoroastrianism. The other side of rekindling that ancient fire was ritualistic expressions of hostility toward the Arabs who brought death and destruction to Iran.

In the final pages of the travelogue, we find the writer reminiscing over his romantic excursions while listening to the music of Hawaiian steel guitar. Connecting the ancient ruins to the Hawaiian music, he speculated that the music was lamenting the dismal fate of the Zoroastrian fire temple. Seduced by the brooding music, he imagined his memories marching in front of his eyes like a "cinema" of moving images. Hedayat borrowed a metaphor from the apparatus of cinema in order to describe his whimsical experiences at the ancient ruins, which brings to mind ʿEshqi's calling his recollections at Ctesiphon ruins a "cinema of the past history" (*sinamāʾi az tārikh-e gozashteh*). And like ʿEshqi, Hedayat projected his romantic sentiments onto Iran's antiquities.

By scripting himself into a movie, Hedayat arguably immersed himself into the luxuries he associated with a European lifestyle. Conducting excursions among ancient "Oriental" ruins (with a local tour-guide) along with an imported pet dog (reviled by the locals), and romantically brooding over the exotic Hawaiian music (in a hotel) are some of the activities European (colonial) traveler-explorers performed in Iran. The "cinema" of this writer's romantic recollections may be understood as a metonym for the

[48] Hedayat, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), 111.

manufactured reality he constructed for himself in his travelogue. Seen in this way, the exotic music of Hawaiian steel guitar provides a fitting soundtrack to his imagined European lifestyle.[49]

Investigating the Eurocentric simulacrum Hedayat inhabited in his travelogue can also shed light on the manner he discursively constructed the image of the Arabs not only in this narrative but also arguably in almost anything he wrote throughout his career. One way to do this is to see how this writer mobilized European anthropological assumptions to delve into the archaeology of the so-called Arab mind. The tropes and discourses Hedayat circulated in his works introduced a Eurocentric ideology in his works. As a result, the way he portrays the Arab Muslims is comparable to the way certain Europeans have represented Africans and/or the so-called "Orientals" as their inferior "others."

Investigating two satirical works by Hedayat can help us see how this Eurocentric ideology framed the representation of Arabs in his works. *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon, posthumously published in 1979; henceforth *The Pearl Canon*) and *al-Beʿsat ul-Islāmiyyah fi Belād al-Afranjiyyah* (A Muslim Delegation in the European Lands, posthumously published in 1985; henceforth *A Muslim Delegation*) have received little critical attention so far perhaps because of their unabashedly racist assumptions about Arabs and the religion they brought to Iran – Islam. As I argue in Chapter Three, in these

[49] Hedayat deployed a similarly anachronistic reality effect in his early play, *Parvin* (1930). In a stage direction, he suggested his Sasanian heroine to play Korsakov's symphonic suit, *Scheherazade* (1888), in order to enhance her scene's nostalgic atmosphere. See Hedayat, *Parvin Dokhtar-e Sasan* (Parvin, the Daughter of Sasan), 19.

works Hedayat foregrounded the Arabs' presumed "barbarity" by exploring their alterity in certain Eurocentric situations.

In *A Muslim Delegation*, Hedayat submits the Arabs to the category of "savages" and parades them in a zoological exhibition in Berlin, which recirculates the animalizing trope we find in the colonial practice of ethnological expositions ("human zoos").[50] Pernicious tropes like these gradually transformed the legacy of Zoroastrian discourse of demonization (Arab as "evil" and "demonic") that could be found in medieval works such as the *Shāhnāmeh*. In their modern incarnation, the Arabs become grotesque monstrosities, with ideological precursors in early colonial cinema's racial freaks.

I will bring Chapter Three to an end by arguing that uncritical appropriation of the findings and ideologies of sciences of archaeology and anthropology diminished the *anti-colonial* aspirations of writers like ʿEshqi and Hedayat since it made them mirror in their works the very repressive discourses they wished to subvert. This was because echoing the particular discourse of "othering" modern Persian nationalism introduced in Iran turned the liberatory agendas of these writers into what may be described as cultural colonization of another subaltern group – the Arabs. The narrative authority ʿEshqi and Hedayat mobilize against the Arabs arguably relies on the authority of the cartographic

[50] For history of ethnological expositions, I rely on recent scholarship such as Blanchard et al., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* and Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950.* The latter book discusses anthropological expositions at Paris' Musée de l'Homme ("Museum of Man"). Hedayat was aware of this museum and researched it apparently while finishing the draft of *A Muslim Delegation.*

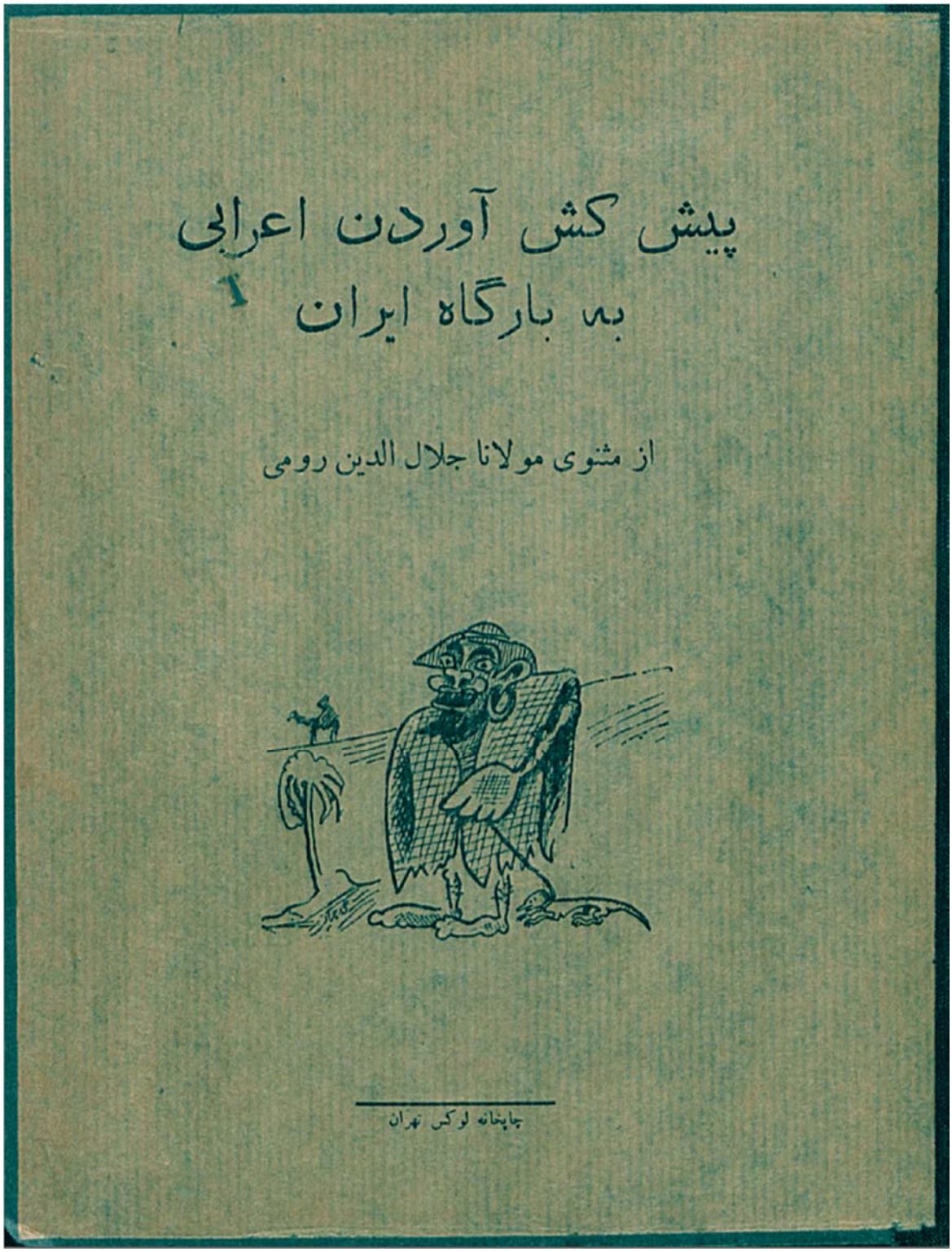
gaze we find in colonial literature.[51] Approximating the pernicious discourses the latter writers unleased against their Indian and/or African "others" arguably *coopted* ʿEshqi and Hedayat as would-be colonial surrogates.

In Chapter Four, I will present comparative readings of certain Parsi writers who appear to play an integral role in the reception of sciences of archaeology and anthropology in Iran in mid-nineteenth century. Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890), an emissary of the Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund in Mumbai travelled to Iran to improve the lives of indigenous Zoroastrian community. Hataria stayed in Iran from 1854 to 1890 and published an important travelogue titled *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān* (Essay on Description of a Travel to Iran, 1865; henceforth *Essay on Description*). The intellectual fervor this Parsi emissary created inspired other Parsis to publish antiquarian surveys of ancient locations in Iran, which I will examine in detail in Chapter Four. As it has been observed, "even today, religious tours to Iran for Parsis and diaspora Zoroastrians follow a virtually identical route to that of Manekji in his travelogue."[52]

As we learn from *Essay on Description* as well as recently published correspondences, the Parsi emissary played an important role in: a) making a claim on the Zoroastrian origins of Iran's ancient heritage, and b) allegorizing that heritage as a golden age, hopelessly buried under layers of Islamic sedimentation. I will argue that Hataria's journey activated a *narrative of reclamation* in Iran and certain Persianate environments

[51] For cartographic gaze in colonial texts, I rely on Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 98-100.

[52] Sheffield, "Iran, the Mark of Paradise or the Land of Ruin," 37.



Picture 4: Sketch of desert Arab signed by Hedayat (Jan 1935)

that endeavored to re-appropriate Iran's pre-Islamic heritage; a heritage he represented as purportedly purloined by Muslim historians.

As we learn from his travelogue, Hataria came to Iran as an intrepid explorer, a cartographer, resolved to conquer a land that posed numerous dangers to him. During the many years that he stayed in the country, he built an extensive archive (consisting of rare books, maps and sketches of rock reliefs) that documented the life and times of Iran's "original inhabitants," the Zoroastrians. The relics Hataria recovered from Iran's pre-Islamic ruins convinced him that ancient Iran was destroyed by a race of "savage" Arabs since, according to him, only "uncivilized" people can destroy such monuments. His racialist assumptions hinged on a discourse of "othering" he apparently borrowed from European colonial texts.

Hataria used his reputation as a knowledgeable and generous man to initiate the first cadre of Persian antiquarians into archaeological endeavors. With very practical "instructions" (*dastūr ul-ʿamal*), he disciplined a generation of Persian antiquarians to turn their gaze to their country's antiquities in order to rediscover relics its "original inhabitants" (the Zoroastrians) had left behind. This was how Abdul-Rahim Kalāntar Zarrābi was commissioned by the Parsi emissary to write his *Tārikh-e Kāshān* (1871), which is believed to be the first history (in Persian) of an ancient locality in Iran.[53] Hataria sent similar "instructions" to the talented Forsat ud-Dowleh Shirazi, commissioning him to collect information pertaining to ancient Iran.[54] Forsat's findings

[53] For the text of these instructions, see chapter headings in Kalāntar, *Tārikh-e Kāshān.*

[54] See Forsat, *Āsār-e ʿAjam* (Works of Non-Arabs), 2-3.

were published in Mumbai as *Āsār-e ʿAjam* (1896) which as far as we know, is the first comprehensive study of antiquities in Iran by a Persian writer.

The Eurocentric archaeological imagination at the heart of these projects authenticated certain metanarratives of European archaeology, which mapped "Oriental" countries like Iran as *terra incognita*; that is, "a land without history." The history this colonial modernity bestowed on Iran was enthusiastically appropriated by indigenous intellectuals such as Sadeq Hedayat who relegated their country's Islamic heritage to the level of "myth" to be replaced with "facts" – uncovered by the modern science of archaeology. In addition to empowering the West's claim over Iran's past, it may be argued that such endeavors rendered Iran *history-less*, subscribing its history to the "free-floating mythology" of the "Orient" Edward Said has described in Orientalist histories.

Chapter One: Shiʿi Passion Plays as a Vehicle For Representing the Sunni "Other"

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Iranian intellectuals felt a profound need to visually appropriate the pre-Islamic past. In order to satisfy this need, the European-styled theatre and opera were exploited to revive the country's ancient grandeur in plays that boasted of spectacular productions. Series of greatly popular historical plays and operas were staged during this time that tried to impress the spectators with extravagant visuals and expensive spectacles. Mirzadeh ʿEshqi's *Rastākhiz-e Salātin-e Iran* (Resurrection of the Iranian Kings; 1921; henceforth *Resurrection*) is a good example of this trend. This "taste for spectacle" was arguably in the making for a long time.[55] The impression European spectacular theatre and glittering opera houses made on Persian travelers visiting Europe in the nineteenth century tends to show the emergence of this taste.

In what will follow, I will try to demonstrate how exposure to European spectacular theatre and opera introduced a "taste for spectacle" in the Persian literature. As a way of accomplishing this, I will examine Persian *taʿziyeh* performances (passion plays) in order to trace the genealogy of this taste as it has influenced conceptions of Self and "Otherness" in nineteenth century Iran. I will end this chapter by arguing that modern developments in the *taʿziyeh* tradition have had a detrimental effect on the representation of Arabs as the despised "other" of the Persian culture. This chapter is meant to be a

[55] I rely on Booth's study of "taste for spectacle" in the Victorian theatre to describe a similar taste in a Persian context. See Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre: 1850-1910*, 1-29.

preamble to the discourse of anti-Arab representation we find in Sadeq Hedayat's writings.

Several of the travelers visiting Europe in the nineteenth century recorded their impressions of European theatre and opera. Almost all of the travelogues they wrote – counting more than a hundred[56] – are immersed in an aura of wonder and amazement. From their simplest reactions to their most sophisticated observations, these travelogues register a profound reception of the element of spectacle and pageantry these travelers observed in the settings they visited during their journeys. The majority of these spectacles of course were witnessed at British and French sites of diversion: opera houses, playhouses and circuses.[57] "Spectacle" (*tamāshā*), as we understand from these travelogues, consists mostly of thrilling scenic illusions manufactured by elaborate stage machineries. This is perhaps why almost anything these travelers say about European theatre and opera concerns the *means* of their production – i.e., the machinery and devices that produced those spectacular sceneries and enabled those breathtaking acrobatics.

[56] For a comprehensive chronology of travelogues that have touched on the topic of European theatre, see Tālebi, "Vāzheh-nāmeh-ye Namāyesh dar Safar-nāmeh-ye Sayyāhān-e Irāni" (Lexicon of Dramatic Arts in Persian Travelogues). See also Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder: Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts from Iran to Europe*, which examines this body of literature with an ethnographical approach.

[57] To these we can add various exhibitions of arts, commodities and panoramas. As we shall see, in the time to come, Iranian elite will draw on the other forms of European entertainment as well such as freak shows and the human zoos.

Nineteenth Century Persian Travelogues

Among the earliest travelogues that relate the experiences of a Persian at European playhouses is *Masir-e Tālebi* (manuscript completed 1804) by Mirza Abū Tāleb Khān (1752–1806). The observations of this early traveler can help us study the emergence of this "taste for spectacle" among the Iranian literati in the nineteenth century. This traveler's terse but keen observations are important since it is apparently the first time the importance of scenery in early nineteenth century theatre is acknowledged in a Persian travelogue. In a section entitled "Description of Playhouse and Astley," Mirza Abū Tāleb has provided some useful information about two major centers of entertainment in Britain: the playhouse and the circus.

After a general description of the playhouse's auditorium (tiers and boxes, pit and revenues), Mirza Abu Tāleb turns his attention to the stage and what he sees on it. Painted scenery fascinates him most: "an immense *taʿziyeh* painting (*pardeh-ye taʿziyeh-ye farākh*), displaying images of cities and mountains, grassy turfs and famous forests is installed on the stage front (*pishāni-ye esteij*). After some storytelling or dancing and singing, it is opened up to reveal new scenery veiled inside it."[58] This is apparently the first time a Persian traveler has underscored the central position of painted scenery in early nineteenth-century Victorian theatre.[59] The mechanical sophistication of these changing scenery attracted Mirza Abu Tāleb's attention as he witnessed "wooden shutters (*qanāt-hā-ye chūbi*) coming together forming a wall without the slightest dividing line left between

[58] Abū Tāleb Khān, *Masir-e Tālebi*, 74-5.

[59] Malekpūr, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Iran* (Dramatic Literature in Iran), vol. 1, 63.

them."[60] The general impression these spectacles made on Mirza Abu Tāleb may be found in varying degrees in later travelogues as well. As he confesses: "the design and colors of these sceneries, and the way they came together, mesmerizes one more than the story and the acting (*naql va bāzi*). They turned the playhouse into magic (*simiyā va limiyā*) and dream and illusion (*khāb va khiyāl*)."[61] By noting the primacy of technique over the play's content, Mirza Abu Tāleb correctly reflected on the *industrial* means of spectacular representation in nineteenth century theatre. As it has been observed, spectacles like these "accustom[ed] audiences to technologies" and made "technologies themselves into a form of entertainment."[62] Since spectacle, as a mode of representation, is primarily geared toward an emphasis on sensory and visual semiotics, it "diffuse[s] wonder or awe".[63] This latter byproduct can be found amply in the travelogues studied here. The fact that Mirza Abu Tāleb is not an "educated" observer, has also resulted in his being deceived by or put under the spell of the spectacles he saw onstage. The rest of this writer's descriptions

[60] Malekpūr, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Iran* (Dramatic Literature in Iran), vol. 1, 75. The "sharp dividing line between the shutters, clearly visible even which they were perfectly joined" was a challenge for the Victorian theatre that was driven by realism and an idea of verisimilitude. See Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, 75. For what Abu Tāleb presumably means by *qanāt-hā-ye chūbi* see Malekpūr, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Iran* (Dramatic Literature in Iran), vol. 1, 62-3; and Habibiān and Āqā-Huseini, *Tamāshā-khāneh-hā-ye Tehrān: 1274-1389* (Tehran's Play Houses: 1274-1389), 33.

[61] Abū Tāleb Khān, *Masir-e Tālebi*, 75. *Simiyā* is believed to be a magical process through which one person's soul enters another person's body. See *Loghatnāmeh Dehkhodā* s.v., "Simiyā."

[62] Richard, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 56.

[63] MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," 7.

concern the architecture of the playhouse and the structure of its backstage. A blueprint of the playhouse complements these descriptions.[64]

Heirat-nāmeh (The Book of Wonders, written in 1809) by Mirza Abu al-Hasan Ilchi (1780–1860) registers similar wonder and amazement at a European theatre. Written a short time after *Masir-e Tālebi*, Ilchi's travelogue goes a step forward in identifying and describing the elements of spectacle this observer encountered in European settings. Consisting of observations made during a diplomatic mission to England, Ilchi's narrative includes accounts of his experiences at British playhouses. Like Mirza Abu Tāleb, Ilchi's wonder and amazement derives mostly from the mechanical virtuosity he observed onstage. Once again, the material splendor of the productions worked on this observer more than anything else: "[these were] strange and wondrous plays which included variegated curtains (*pardeh-hā-ye haft-rang*) that created kaleidoscopic images (*naqsh-hā-ye lown lown*) and when their colors changed they revealed faces of angels and demons."[65] Ilchi is usually silent about the *manner* these images were produced which speaks of his probable unfamiliarity with the technical aspects of theatrical productions. The fairy tale he saw apparently featured extraordinary acrobatics too. As he tells us, the actors in the play "emerged from under the wood beneath their feet and instantly vanished from the view."[66] Again, without inferring the mechanism behind these tricks – in this case, how

[64] For an analysis of *Masir-e Tālebi* and what it can tell us about Persian reception of European theatre in the nineteenth century, see Malekpūr, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Iran* (Dramatic Arts in Iran), vol. 1, 55-69.

[65] Ilchi, *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders), 112.

[66] Ilchi, *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders), 112.

trap-doors work – Ilchi naively let these feats of spectacular display "add wonder to [his] wonder" (*heirat bar heirat afzāyad*).

Ilchi also had an opportunity to see a modern production of Shakespeare's *King Lear* by the celebrated director-manager, John Phillip Kemble (1757-1823). Thrilled by what he saw onstage, Ilchi's descriptions are again overwhelmed by the details of the play's scenic production: "several multicolored curtains displayed wondrous images that bewildered the wise people" (*āqelān az ān dar heirān būdand*).[67] As we learn, these were followed by yet another "multicolored curtain that was set up the way we do it in Iran for puppet shows. Images of demons and fairies; humans, birds and beasts were projected onto the curtain from behind."[68] Here, Ilchi has tried to identify the indigenous Persian dramatic tradition that seemed closest to what he had seen in this play. As for the acting, a comic actor fascinated Ilchi more than the rest: "Carmelli [spelled *Karmaldi*], one of the well-known actors, played in a way that I will never forget. He used to effortlessly jump in and out of a window that was five meters [*zarʿ*] high and each time [that he appeared] he looked differently. The spectators couldn't contain themselves with laughter."[69] Ilchi brings his comments to an end by surveying the playhouse's architecture (*seir-e mohandesi-ye bannāyān*).

As time went by, the level of sophistication we observe in these reports grows. In half a century, Abū Tāleb Khān's somewhat hasty accounts gave way to sophisticated reports on spectacle in European theatre and opera that were mostly done with the shortcomings

[67] Ilchi, *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders), 112.

[68] Ilchi, *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders), 133.

[69] Ilchi, *Heirat-nāmeh* (The Book of Wonders), 133.

of prior narratives. In the new travelogues, the Persian traveler's grasp over European spectacular theatre increased and accounts that are more descriptive started to replace the tropes of wonder and amazement we find in the previous narratives.[70] Arguably, this increasing awareness came to a culmination in *Safar-nāmeh-ye Hāji Sayyāh* (The Travelogue of Hāji Sayyāh; 1860). Written by Mirzā Mohammad ʿAli Mahallāti, better known as Hāji Sayyāh (*c.* 1836-1925), this travelogue features some of the most intimate descriptions of European spectacle (inside and outside of theatres) in Persian travel writing ever written. Complementing its predecessors, Hāji Sayyāh's travelogue provides important information about the emergence of the "taste for spectacle" I try to describe here.

The many journeys of Hāji Sayyāh gave him ample opportunities to make firsthand observations about Europe's bourgeoning commodity culture. Spectacle – as "a particular cultural form for the representation of manufactured things"[71] – was paramount in metropolitan cities such as London and Paris. Visiting the latter at the height of its capitalist expansion at the middle of the nineteenth century, Hāji Sayyāh avidly observed

[70] Perhaps one of the best expressions of such wonder and amazement belongs to the Qajar traveler Ebrāhim Sahhāfbāshi. At pains to put into words what he had seen in London, he simply admits: "the playhouse has to be seen and not written about. You have to see and admire it yourself" (*owzāʿ tamāshā-khāneh didani ast na neveshtani bāyad did u rashk burd*). See Sahhāfbāshi, *Safar-nāmeh-ye Ebrāhim Sahhāfbāshi* (Ebrāhim Sahhāfbāshi's Travelogue), 38.

[71] For spectacle as a capitalist form of representation in nineteenth century Britain, see Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*. The quote is taken from p. 54. This interesting topic is outside the focus of this dissertation so I do not delve into it any more.

the extravaganza of the "spectacular reality" that surrounded him day and night.[72] However, as we learn from him, before stepping inside the opera house, Hāji Sayyāh went through an episode of intense psychological turmoil that (literally) left him sleepless for several days. The bright gas lamps, glass windows and perpetual merrymaking he observed in Paris made him contemplate questions about happiness and joy, and how material culture and commodities can facilitate their attainment in life. Metaphorically speaking, this episode functioned as a sort of *rite de passage* preparing Hāji Sayyāh for what was awaiting him in the city's biggest opera house, the Grand Opera.

Persian travelers almost always start their accounts with the interiors of the play- or opera-house. Thus, as it may be expected, Hāji Sayyāh started his description of the Grand Opera with its interiors: the seats and tiers, uniformed staff and clean restrooms. He also reports how the spectators used *opera glasses* (or binoculars) to better immerse themselves in the play. Once done with the auditorium and spectators, he turns his gaze to the stage, looking for what had preoccupied him ever since he came to Paris: gas lamps and lighting. It is in the following report that we can find a most illuminating description of European spectacular theatre in a Persian travelogue:

> There were colorful lights on the stage when the dance went on. The sight was fantastic (*mahshar-e gharibi būd*); it was as if a [massive cloud] (*abr*) [was] suspended and the sun shone through it. One side of the stage was bright with light; another side was red like burning copper. One side showed a cloudy atmosphere; still a corner was radiant as sunshine. Amid the obscure haze (*dar miyān-e abr-hā*) fairies dressed in delicate clothes suddenly came into view like

[72] For spectacle and "spectacular reality" in nineteenth century France, see Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris.*

> statues and very slowly, moving their limbs in harmony with the music, went up to the [ceiling] of the stage.[73]

The bright lights and festive atmosphere of Paris are also reflected in the play staged at the Grand Opera. The play's illusionistic scenery goes hand in hand with the spectacular reality Hāji Sayyāh found outside of the opera house on the streets of Paris. The so-called transition scene or the sunrise he describes above was a hallmark of the nineteenth century spectacular theatre in Europe. Implementing the latest technology in lighting the stage with gas and limelight, the transition scenes reveled in exquisite color effects to achieve spectacular sunsets and sunrises.[74] The impressive light effects this Persian traveler saw at Grand Opera tend to complement the technology that enabled those extraordinary movements on the stage. In fact, the impression European theatre made on this Persian traveler was so great that in an interview in 1875 he included it among "the most striking things" he had seen in the world – side by side ancient monuments such as the Pyramids and even the Persepolis ("tomb of Jam Jid Dyha").[75]

The somewhat disjointed imagery of the passage quoted above can be taken as a continuation of the Persian travelers' seeming inability to comprehend, and therefore correctly represent, the *manner* these spectacular performances were produced in nineteenth-century Europe. Thus, although Hāji Sayyāh is undoubtedly one of the most perceptive Persian travelers, he still needs to grasp the workings of European theatre and

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[73] Hāji Sayyāh, *An Iranian in Nineteenth Century Europe* (trans. Mehrbanoo Deyhim), 128.

[74] For lighting in nineteenth century spectacular theatre in Britain, see "Lighting and Scenic Effects" in Booth, *Theatre in Victorian Age*, 82-93.

[75] For a facsimilie of Hāji Sayyāh's interview with the American magazine *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, see Ferdowsi, "Goftegū bā Hāji Sayyāh" (A Conversation with Hāji Sayyāh), 359.

opera. The other similarity connecting his travelogue to its predecessors is that it still has to make occasional recourse to certain rhetorical conventions in order to convey its author's inability to capture the spectacular reality Hāji Sayyāh observed in Paris.[76] These rhetorical gestures further exoticized Europe as a land of extraordinary and inconceivable things.

The prevalence of travel writing in nineteenth-century Iran speaks to its popularity among writers and readers. Although many of these travelogues remained in manuscript format for years, several others appeared in print (e.g., *Masir-e Tālebi* was published in Kolkata in 1827) and were accessible to a wider group of readers. Translation of European travelogues into Persian during the Qajar era also tends to boost the popularity of the genre among Iranians.[77] Sometimes these travelogues were intended for a specific readership. This readership consisted of the personalities associated with the Persian court as many of these travelers were serving diplomatic missions for the Persian government. For example, it has been suggested that Farrokh Khān Amin-ud-Dowleh's diary of his trip to Europe, *Makhzan ul-Vaqāyeʿ* (The Treasury of Events), "was to be read by the king and other important personalities in the Iranian ruling elite."[78] As I shall try

[76] Although there must be some truth in these claims, conventional rhetorical gestures such as "can't be expressed or described in words" (*be taqrir va tahrir nemigunjad*) or "I can't express it let alone describing it in words" (*az taqrirash ʿajz dāram tā be tahrir che rasad*) suggest a discourse of exoticization we commonly find in nineteenth century Persian travel accounts to Europe. For the potential influence of Persian literary tradition on these "stylistic inconsistencies," see Hanaway, "Persian Travel Narratives," 256-7.

[77] On translation of European texts at this time, see Jaʿfariān, *Panjāh Safarnāmeh-ye Hajj-e Qajari* (Fifty Qajar Hajj Travelogues) vol. 1, 14.

[78] Ghanoonparvar, *In a Persian Mirror*, 24.

to explain in the next section, the impact of these travelogues may be traced in the novelties they introduced in the indigenous dramatic tradition in Iran. The *taʿziyeh* tradition offers an important site where the "taste for spectacle" discussed above finds numerous opportunities to spectacularize the performances and pageantries relating to the Moharram ceremonies.

Taʿziyeh Performances as Spectacle and Piety

During the time Persian travelers were pursuing the wonders of spectacular theatre and opera in European countries, their own indigenous dramatic tradition arguably was producing equally elaborate spectacles. The annual ceremonies and pageantries of the month of Moharram that commemorate the martyrdom of the third Shiʿi Imam, Hossein ibn ʿAli (626-80), are where we can find this type of spectacle. Known as *taʿziyeh*, the dramatizations of the events leading to the death of Hossein have been the source of extravagant representations in the history of dramatic arts in Iran. The earliest accounts of Moharram rituals go back to the Safavid era when the pageantries of the month of Moharram were used for propagating Shiʿism in the Persian culture.[79] For more than half a century the Qajars invested extensively in Moharram ceremonies and especially *taʿziyeh* performances for "promoting the religious legitimacy" of their rule.[80] The spectacular performances that were sponsored by Naser ud-Din Shah (r. 1831-1896) and his affluent

[79] See Calmard's "Shiʿi Rituals and Power," for a discussion of Moharram ceremonies in the Safavid era.

[80] Āqāʾī, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, 20.

dignitaries have left a remarkable impression on the minds of both Iranians and the Europeans who visited the country during this time. In 1870s Naser ud-Din Shah erected the last, and the ultimate, state *tekyeh* (amphitheater), called Tekyeh Dowlat, to centralize these ceremonies in a location close to his palace.[81]

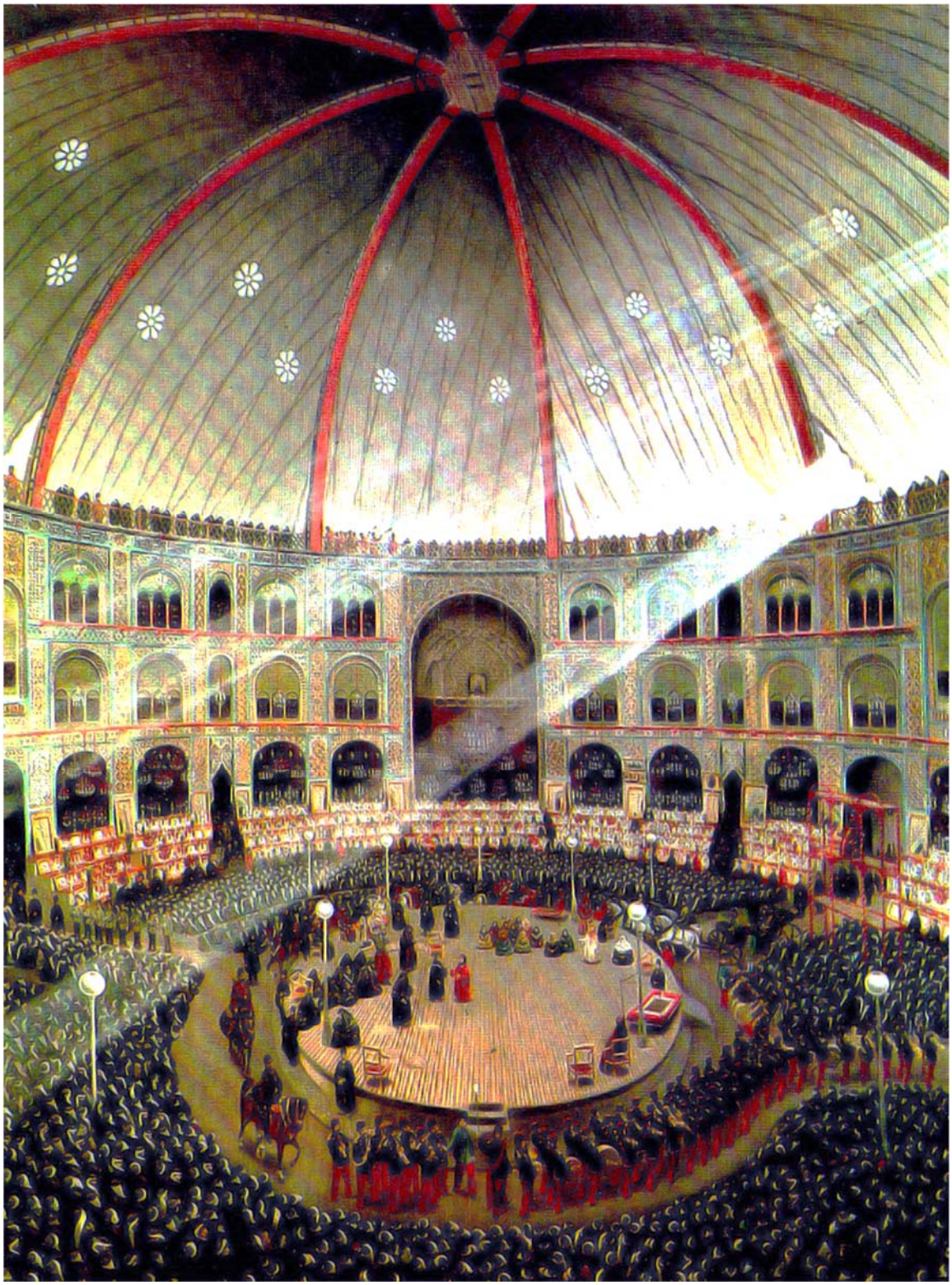
Described as "the biggest performance hall (*namāyesh-khāneh*) of all ages in Persian history,"[82] Tekyeh Dowlat entertained thousands of people with some of the most spectacular *taʿziyeh* performances ever seen in Iran. The official reports about annual Moharram ceremonies in 1850s and 1860s show how the Qajar king cultivated a certain "taste for spectacle" in various royal *tekyeh*s that came to fruition in 1870s in the performances of Tekyeh Dowlat.[83] These reports suggest that Naser ud-Din Shah personally attended to the internal decorations of royal *tekyeh*s, stage-managing whatever happening inside them with the highest production standards. By mobilizing an array of commodities – including imported mirrors, crystals (*qanādil*) and especially "glassware and lamps" (*bolūr va asbāb-e cherāgh*) – the Qajar king and his dignitaries created extravagant displays that impressed any onlooker.[84] Illuminating the nights with

[81] The exact construction date of Tekyeh Dowlat is still a matter of debate. For a summary of the debates surrounding this issue, see Shahidi, "Tekyeh Dowlat va Barrasi-hā-ye Nāqes va Nādorost" (Tekyeh Dowlat and Flawed and Incorrect Studies), 39-101.

[82] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 123.

[83] Two newspapers published official reports about these ceremonies: *Vaqayeʿ Ettefāqi-yeh* and *Dowlat-e ʿElliyeh-ye Iran*.

[84] In the official reports, we constantly find Naser ud-Din Shah prying at the decorations of royal *tekyeh*s. A typical report reads like this: "Most nights [the king] came to watch the lamps (*seir-e cherāgh*) inside the *tekyeh* which were displayed in utmost splendor (*nahāyat-e shokūh*)." See



Picture 5: Tekyeh Dowlat at the height of its glory.
Painting by court painter, Kamāl ul-Molk (1848-1940)

thousands of lamps, a custom known as *cherāghāni* ("illumination"), has been reported during the Safavid era.[85] The Qajar king pursued this nocturnal tradition to enhance the spectacular aspects of royal ceremonies. However, the main source of inspiration for Naser ud-Din Shah arguably was the burgeoning commodity culture he witnessed in the European countries he visited in 1870s and 1880s. In his travelogues, the Qajar king diligently recorded his observations about the spectacles surrounding the Crystal Palace exhibition and the Royal Albert Hall theatre in London.[86]

These nineteenth century displays of ostentation were as much a ceremony of legitimation as they were "an instrument of domination" over the Shiʿi culture's perceived "others".[87] Rooted in centuries of sectarian strife, the *taʿziyeh* performances have been used by the Shiʿi dynasties in Iran to vent out their frustration over the death of Imam Hossein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, in 680 CE by the Umayyad caliph, Yazid ibn Moʿāviyyeh. Persian dynasties such as the Safavids (1501–1722) and then the Qajars (1785-1925) mobilized the strong sentiments surrounding Hossain's martyrdom to facilitate the establishment of Shiʿi religious solidarity among their peoples. The elevation of Shiʿism to the status of state religion in Iran by the Safavids turned the tragic events of Karbala into "the ultimate exemplar" of the clashes between Shiʿis and Sunnis.[88] This was

Kūhestāni-nezhād, "Darāmadi bar Tekyeh-hā-ye Dowlati" (Introduction on Royal Tekyehs), for similar reports.

[85] For *cherāghāni* in Safavid era see Calmard, "Shiʿi Rituals and Power," 148.

[86] See Naser ud-Din Shah's *Safar-nāmeh* (Travel Narrative, 1874).

[87] Ghaffari refers to Naser ud-Din Shah's using the *taʿziyeh* tradition as "an instrument of domination" over the Qajar society. See "Theatrical Buildings and Performances in Tehran," 96.

[88] Āqāʿī, "The Origins of the Sunni-Shiʿite Divide," 43.

when the Moharram ceremonies along with the ritual cursing of the Sunni caliphs "acquired the status of a national institution" in Iran.[89] Once institutionalized, state sponsorship guaranteed the popularity of these ceremonies as they helped Persian rulers spread the doctrine of Shiʿism in the larger Iranian plateau.[90]

When Shiʿism was elevated to the status of official religion in Iran, sectarian strife was "sublimated" in literary and dramatic expressions.[91] Dramatic performances such as *taʿziyeh*s thus became a vehicle for promulgating antagonistic sentiments toward the Sunnis, casting them as the "other" of the Shiʿi population. As it has been argued, this process used *taʿziyeh* performances as "a nationalistic site for identification and disidentification" of Shiʿi and Sunni values, respectively.[92] Therefore, while it became a duty for every Persian Shiʿi to acknowledge Imam Hossein's rightful claim to caliphate, denouncing Yazid for depriving him of his right (*haqq*) became an equally important precept. Similarly, expressing sympathy for Hossain's innocence at the moment of his martyrdom paralleled outbursts of hatred and indignation toward his murderers. This ideological bifurcation divided the personages of the Karbala narrative into two binary opposites: Hossain and his followers were fondly categorized as *owliyāʾ* ("the friends") and Yazid (the Caliph) and his supporters were renounced as *ashqiyāʾ* ("the wretched").[93] The characters populating each group rarely trespass these highly demarcated

[89] Calmard, "ʿĀzādāri," 176.

[90] Chelkowski, "Bibliographical Spectrum," 256.

[91] Baktāsh, "Taʿziyeh and Its Philosophy," 97.

[92] Mottahedeh, "Karbala Drag Kings and Queens," 79.

[93] In some *taʿziyeh* texts *owliyāʾ* are also called *atqiyāʾ* ("the pious").

categories.[94] The *taʿziyeh* composers have traditionally rarefied this ontological duality as something as enduring as light versus darkness. Their sheer devotion to their Imam and pious commitment to despise his perceived enemies seem to explain these developments.[95]

As time went by, these composers made further distinctions among the all-Arab cast of the narrative of Karbala by regarding *owliyā* ("the friends") as "good Arabs" and the *ashqiyā* ("the wretched"), "bad Arabs." This set in motion a complex process in which the Arab "other" was partially appropriated and partially disavowed.[96] One byproduct of this process was *indigenization* of Hossain as a Persian hero and *spectacularization* of Yazid and his followers as the archetypal "bad Arabs." Apparently, it was from here that the despised Arab "other" found its way into the Persian dramatic literature – and from there into the works of Mirzādeh ʿEshqi and Sadeq Hedayat (discussed in the coming chapters).

Adorning the "good Arabs" with the core values and ideals of their culture, the *taʿziyeh* composers initiated a process of cultural appropriation that endowed the "good Arabs" with Persian characteristics. From their costumes to their singing style and even personal traits, the "good Arabs" were re-constituted with what was "meaningful and

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[94] One exception to this rule is Horr ibn Riyāhi who switched camps and joined Hossein's. Even the performers in the real world are said to have held on to this division of labor. Once they perform a certain character (belonging to either camp), they never opt for an opposing character. See Malekpūr, *The Islamic Drama*, 124.

[95] Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments in the Taʿziyeh," 42-3.

[96] This process arguably is reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's theory of ambivalence in his study of colonial discourse. According to Bhabha, the colonizer is partially *mimicked* and partially *mocked* by the colonized. See Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism."

inspiring" for the Persians in their culture and civilization.[97] For example, in battle scenes Imam Hossein is usually seen in a fighting attire that is inspired by popular perceptions about the *Shāhnāmeh* figures.[98] The Persian indigenous tradition of *naqqāli* ("recounting"), or storytelling from epic texts such as the *Shāhnāmeh*, over time, had popularized these images in painted pictures the storytellers carried around when reciting their epic stories. At other times, Hossein would don a "gold-embroidered green gown" showing his regal status.[99] Hossein's ancient Persian heroic attire enhanced the "authenticity" of his portrayal as a Persian hero. The costumes of other "good Arabs" similarly show traces of contemporary (Safavid and Qajar) dressing styles.[100]

The physical features of the "good Arabs" reinforced the above dictum. As one writer has observed, the individual personifying Imam Hossein "must be a mature man (*mard-e kāmel*) with an average beard, nice face, good voice, and his clothes and appearance has to be luminous and his voice and gestures has to suggest strength of spirit, courage, and bravery."[101] The singing style of the "good Arabs" is similarly inspired by classical Persian musical traditions. The *Arāq* and *Chahārgāh* modes they use for delivering their lines show the influence of Persian sensibilities.[102] The poetry articulating their parts possesses some degree of refinement and is embellished with verses from classical Persian poets

[97] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Tradition*, 129.

[98] Malekpūr, *The Islamic Drama*, 130.

[99] Mostowfi, *Sharh-e Zendegāni-ye Man* (Account of My Life), 288.

[100] Beizāʿī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 154.

[101] Sadr, *Khāterāt-e Sadr al-Ashraf*, 44-45; quoted in Floor, *The History of Theatre in Iran*, 165.

[102] Chelkowski, "Dramatic and Literary Aspects," 131.

such as Saʿdi, Hafiz and Rumi.[103] Draped in Persian heroic attire, and chanting parts melodiously after familiar musical modes, Hossein was cast more like a Persian prince than an Arab hero.[104] Downplaying his Arab (ethnic) origins must have increased his acceptance among Persian spectators, enhancing the latter's identification with their Imam. This was a goal for Shiʿi popular rituals.

This process of indigenization in a sense not only tried to garb the "good Arabs" in superficially Persian features. It also tried to Persianize them from the inside. One source of capital mobilized in the *taʿziyeh* texts to do so has been the *Shāhnāmeh* by Ferdowsi. "In *taʿziyeh*, when they praise a man for his manliness (*mardānegi*) they compare him with Rostam and Zāl."[105] In this way, the "good Arabs" share heroic ideals with Persian culture's national heroes. Sometimes famous *Shāhnāmeh* characters are invoked to highlight a quality in a *taʿziyeh* character. For example, when Horr wants to boast of his heroism he engages in *rajaz-khāni* ("declaimed challenge") and compares himself to a character from the national epic: "If Afrāsiāb hears my name / He will faint from my outcry" (*Agar besh-navad nāmam Afrāsiāb / ze bīm-e nahibam konad zahreh āb*).[106] Described as "one of the most authentic scenes" in *taʿziyeh* performances, these one-on-

[103] For the relationship between classical Persian poetry and the *taʿziyeh* texts, see Tāvūsi *et al.*, "Sheʿr-e Kohan-e Pārsi dar Majāles-e Taʿziyeh" (Ancient Persian Poetry in *Taʿziyeh* Performances), 1-18; and Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (*Taʿziyeh* and Its Performance in Iran), 543-91.

[104] Hossein's being called a *shāh* ("king") or *shāhanshah* ("king of kings") in the *taʿziyeh* texts also reveals his new status as a Persianized sovereign.

[105] Ghaffary, "Darāmadi bar Namāyesh-hā-ye Irāni" (Introduction on Persian Drama), 180

[106] See Humāyūni, *Taʿziyeh dar Iran* (Taʿziyeh in Iran), 224.

one challenges or *rajaz-khāni*s show direct influence of *muteqāreb* meter used in the *Shāhnāmeh*.[107] In such moments, Horr must have reminded the spectators of many *Shāhnāmeh* heroes they had known from the *naqqāli* tradition of storytelling. By putting the Arab Islamic characters in proximity of its "national" heroes, the Shiʿi culture replenished its repertoire of heroes. Horr's invocation of Afrāsiāb can also provide a window for studying the mythical assimilation at work here.

This process of mythical assimilation grafted the narrative of Karbala, along with its idealized hero, Hossein, into the pre-Islamic mythic history of the Persian culture. Re-placed in the new cultural landscape, Hossein's identity reportedly absorbed the characteristics of a mythical Persian prince called Siyāvush.[108] This process of mythologization let Hossein to attain a liminal position, residing, in Shāhrokh Meskūb's words, in the "blurry boundary between myth and history" (*marz-e mubham-e ostūreh va tārikh*).[109] As a result, Hossein can disrupt the narrative in the *taʿziyeh* texts to perform miraculous tasks. For example, he can achieve *ubiquity* (while fighting in Karbala, he can traverse continents instantaneously to help a Shiʿi in India); *clairvoyance* (he can see hidden things); and *clairaudience* (he can hear words spoken in distant lands), etc.[110]

A biographical account from the tenth century titled *History of Bukhara*, tells us that Zoroastrians used to commemorate Siyāvush's death in songs called *kīn-e Siyāvush* ("the

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[107] Mamnoun, "Taʿziyeh from the Viewpoint of the Western Theatre," 166.

[108] Siyāvush was the son of Kavūs, a mythical king. Siyāvush was one of those few who possessed *farr* (divine glory) and was considered an ideal hero. His unjust death by Afrāsiāb has been the topic of memorable poetry in books like the *Shāhnāmeh*. See the *Shāhnāmeh* vol. 3/p. 6-250.

[109] Meskūb, *Sūg-e Siyāvush* (Mourning Siyavash), 88.

[110] For a discussion of Hossein's superhuman powers see Esmāʿili, *Teshneh dar Miqātgah*, 120-2.

vengeance of Siyāvush").[111] The fact that these songs were mourning songs (*nowheh*) has led to conclusions concerning the existence of a "mourning cult" in pre-Islamic Iran that had Siyāvush at its focus.[112] According to Bausani, Zoroastrians' "transposition of revenge into songs and funeral laments" indicates a thematic continuity with the *taʿziyeh* texts in post-Islamic Iran.[113] The existence of Zoroastrian mourning songs, called *geristan-e moghān* ("the weeping of the Magi"), suggests that pre-Islamic mourning rituals may have been assimilated into the Shiʿi mourning ceremonies, offering new varieties of old patterns. Yarshater has explained this accresion of layers in this way:

> The martyrdom of Hossein and his kin found a ready ground in Persian tradition in order to develop into an inspiring and elaborate mourning drama. It inherited the major features of a long-standing practice which had deep roots in the Persian soul.[114]

But undoubtedly the ultimate move in indigenizing Hossein involves his alleged marriage to Shahrbanū (literally, "lady of the land"), the daughter of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgerd III. This apocryphal marriage has been the subject of more than thirty *taʿziyeh* pieces where Shahrbanū is portrayed affectionately as an ideal wife and mother.[115] According to Eftekhārzādeh, during the Safavid era, major Shiʿi scholars (such as Koleini, Saddūq and Majlesi) incorporated Shahrbanū's story into their histories of Shiʿism, justifying the special position she occupies in the *taʿziyeh* texts.[116]

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[111] Narshakhi, *History of Bukhara*, 17 and 23.

[112] Yārshāter, *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3(1), 93.

[113] Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, 365.

[114] Yārshāter, "Taʿziyeh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rites in Iran," 93.

[115] See *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Shahr-banū".

[116] Eftekhārzādeh, *Shūʿūbiyyeh*, 293-337.

The complex process of indigenization described above omitted the "good Arabs" from the category of the "other" of the Shiʿi people, leaving the "bad Arabs" to constitute it solely. As a result, anything "abhorred and despised in the ideal Iranian life" is projected onto the character of the "bad Arabs."[117] Made to stand diametrically opposite Hossein and his followers, Yazid and his supporters are systematically disavowed and discredited in the *taʿziyeh* texts. Traditionally considered as residing outside of Islam – calling them *kāfar* (unbeliever), *molhed* (apostate) and *mushrek* (polytheist) is common – the "bad Arabs" have been the subject of systematic vilification in these texts.[118] It was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century that a certain sense of dramatic realism restored the historical position of these characters, as caliph and generals.[119] The composers' Shiʿi prejudice made them exaggerate the ferocity of these characters, thinking that "the more forcefully they portrayed [them], the more heroic ['the good Arabs'] would appear."[120] Along this line of reasoning, representational aspects of the "bad Arabs" – from their costumes and singing to their mental makeup and actions – are overstated to mark their aberration. As we shall see, it was through a profound preoccupation with the "bad Arabs" that the Qajar "taste for spectacle" nourished itself dramatically. By the turn of the century in Iran (1920s), modern European-styled theatre was recruited to do justice to the Arab "other" as it rose to the status of the archenemy of the Iranian nation.

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[117] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Tradition*, 129.

[118] The conventions of storytelling I am describing here tend to be common among all nations and are not unique to Shiʿi literature in Iran.

[119] Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments," 43.

[120] Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments," 43.

For example, in contrast to the heroically dressed Hossein, the "bad Arabs" are usually dressed in chain armor and combat gear. Depicting them as fierce warlords accentuated Hossein's innocence as a besieged hero. Color symbolism further highlighted their "nature" (*zāt*) by cladding them in gaudy (especially red) costumes.[121] In the *taʿziyeh* productions of Tekyeh Dowlat, jeweled clothes were borrowed from the royal family or the royal museum to recreate the splendid costumes of the "bad Arabs."[122] As we learn from contemporary accounts, *taʿziyeh* producers used to mobilize an ocean of commodities to create extravagant spectacles of Shemr and Yazid's court and costumes.[123] The material abundance we observe in these scenes stands in contradistinction to the austere simplicity of the life of "good Arabs," symbolized by scarcity of scenery. Absence of material objects (even food or water) in sections relating to the "good Arabs" is supposed to confer an aura of sanctity on their existence.[124] The "bad Arabs," in their sinful setting, commit anything the "good Arabs" renounce: reveling and wine drinking,

[121] Different colors mark characters as good or bad in the *taʿziyeh* texts: *green* (representing Prophet Muhammad and Islam) stands for the "good Arabs" and *red* (signifying blood and violence) stands for the "bad Arabs." The "good Arabs" may also don *white* costumes (regular Arab gown or death shroud) and the "bad Arabs," yellow or orange (again representing gaudiness).

[122] Mostowfi, *Sharh-e Zendegāni-ye Man* (Account of My Life), 402.

[123] In some productions sumptuous scenes like these were inserted to spectacularize the performance. The French ambassador, Eustace De Lorey, watched a production of *Taʿziyeh-ye Qāsem* in Tehran (1907) in which the composers had apparently arbitrarily inserted a scene featuring Yazid and his court. None of the extant texts feature such a scene. See Būlūkbāshi, *Taʿziyeh-khāni*, 138.

[124] Esmāʿili, *Teshneh dar Miqātgah* (Thirsty in Meeting Place), 154.

thieving and womanizing.[125] These portrayals endeavored to reject the religious legitimacy of the caliph and his supporters' fight against Hossein in Karbala. As they suggest the "bad Arabs" killed Hossein for purely worldly reasons.

Reflecting the nature of their unholy existence, the manner the "bad Arabs" deliver their parts is also distorted: they "[shout] their lines in deep, gruff tones, providing a sharp contrast to the ['good Arabs'] who [...] [sing] their lines in tenor tones."[126] Their intentionally uglified style is produced either by denying them melody – they sing "inharmoniously" (*bi-āhang*) – or making them distort their speech contours by excessive stress – "harshly" (*oshtulum-vār*).[127] Depending on the situation, the "bad Arabs" may at times "recite [their parts] in ringing tones," in a way that is reminiscent of the *Shāhnāmeh* story-tellers.[128] Sometimes the "bad Arabs" are portrayed as fierce extras in Yazid's army. Simply called "the Arab," this swarm of spearmen (never uttering a word) is used as *extras* so that it may be slayed in dozens by the "good Arabs."[129] As for their physical features, the "bad Arabs" are usually played by performers who have a hulking figure or those who have "a burnt and brownish face like the Arabs" (*hamchūn ʿArab-hā chehrehʾi sūkhteh u ghahvehʾi*).[130] The murderer of Hossein, Shemr, usually gets the lion's share of

[125] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Traditions*, 128.

[126] Pettys, "Taʿziyeh: Persian Renewal Ritual," 353.

[127] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performances in Iran), 602.

[128] Malekpūr, *The Islamic Drama*, 134.

[129] See Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performances in Iran), 333-4.

[130] Būlūkbāshi, "Taʿziyeh-khāni" (Taʿziyeh Performance), 594.

demonization: he has a "pig's teeth" (*dandān-e khūk*); suffers from "a brand of psoriasis" (*bar sineh dāgh-e baras*); and "seven nipples" like a dog.[131]

Complementing their costumes, singing and looks, the "bad Arabs" are mentally driven by the opposite of the virtuous qualities that radiate from the "good Arabs." If the latter are benign and benevolent, the "bad Arabs" exhibit an array of atrocious qualities:

> They are shown inflicting cruelty for its own sake, murdering helpless children, and denying water to those dying of thirst. They are, furthermore, deaf to the pleas of holy men and persons of virtue. They ignore Holy Scripture, and indeed make fun of it […].[132]

The grotesque barbarity of these actions points to the particular role the "bad Arabs" are supposed to play in the *taʿziyeh* performances: raising hatred and indignation in the spectators. As a nineteenth century observer has noted, the "bad Arabs" committed their atrocities "amidst an universal outburst of sorrow and indignation."[133] As was mentioned earlier, the ritualistic cursing of the "bad Arabs" was considered a meritorious act in the *taʿziyeh* performances. Yet, sometimes, the spectators' exasperation provoked dangerous behavior. Reports about the "bad Arabs" being pelted with stone, attacked physically or allegedly lynched by the overwhelmed spectators are common.[134] Sometimes due to the pressures involving personifying the "bad Arabs," these performers either ran away or

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[131] See the excerpt quoted in Mamnoun, "Taʿziyeh from the Viewpoint of the Western Theatre," 166. For a likely source of inspiration for these animalizing tropes, see my discussion of *Rowzat ul-Shohadā* in footnote no. 92.

[132] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Traditions*, 128.

[133] Sheil, *Glimpses*, 129.

[134] For a list of such behavior see the section "Consequences of Actors" in Floor, *The History of Theatre in Iran*, 181-3.

were terrified to perform their roles accurately. This reveals the tense atmosphere surrounding the "bad Arabs" in these rituals especially when, surrounded by overwhelmed spectators, they made the "good Arabs" a victim of their atrocious actions.

The righteous passion of the *taʿziyeh* makers guided them to make a spectacle out of the "bad Arabs" as an abominable people driven by excess and deficiency. The efforts of the *taʿziyeh* makers in producing an exaggerated spectacle of the "bad Arabs" served devotional purposes. Over-determined by the *taʿziyeh* makers' ideological commitment, the "bad Arabs" "were made to appear ridiculous by the frivolous and buffoon-like behavior of the actors playing them."[135] Arguably, the barbarically cruel behavior of the "bad Arabs" will be the only thing constituting them as the "other" in the *taʿziyeh* performances – both literally and visually.

With the growing popularity of *taʿziyeh* performances in the latter half of the nineteenth century, its composers started expanding its repertoire "to add variety and secular detail" to its chronology of Karbala events.[136] These new additions, known as *gūsheh* ("subsection"), are supplementary episodes that add detail to the bone structure of the Karbala narrative.[137] In Seymour Chatman's narratological classification, *gūsheh* qualifies as a *satellite* plot component as its "function is that of filling in, elaborating, complementing" the main events, or *kernel* components, of the Karbala narrative.[138] Since

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[135] Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments," 42.

[136] Chelkowski, "Taʿziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Garde theatre of Iran," 8.

[137] Different equivalents have been suggested for *gūsheh*: "peripheral *taʿziyeh*" (Anvar), "digression" (Chelkowski), "allusion-to-the-event" (Floor), "sub-plot" (Malekpūr) and "embellishment" (Shahidi).

[138] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 54.

these episodes do not drive the story forward, they tend to play a decorative function, "thickening" the narrative texture of Karbala stories. If once *taʿziyeh* repertoires only consisted of dramatizations of main (kernel) events of Imam Hossein's martyrdom, these supplementary episodes replenish that repertoire by a range of secular and sometimes profane detail. The preponderance of extravagance and lavish pageantry in these supplementary episodes arguably points to their catering to the "taste for spectacle" Naser ud-Din Shah had cultivated in Tekyeh Dowlat performances.

Accommodating both religious and secular topics, these episodes dramatize a range of materials adapted from biblical/Qurʿanic sources, fairy tales, literary texts (e.g., by Rumi) and even historical events. The titles of some of the well-known episodes speak of their novel content: *Be Chāh Andākhtan-e Yūsef* (Throwing Joseph in the Well), *Shast Bastan-e Dīv* (Binding the Demon's Toes), *Darvish-e Biyābāni va Mūsā* (The Wandering Dervish and Moses) and *Nāser ud-Din Shāh* (Nāser ud-Din Shāh), etc.[139] Incorporation of Persian themes – especially those drawn from mythology and folklore which include Siyāvush, Shahrbanū and *dīv* (demon) – has created a remarkably Persianized character for these episodes. This has distanced these episodes from the core events and even values of traditional *taʿziyeh* performances. In these new episodes, aspects of Arab culture and society recede to open up a space for the entertainment of Persian social and cultural values.[140]

[139] For a list of these episodes, see Malekpūr, *The Islamic Drama*, 82.

[140] Būlūkbāshi, "Taʿziyeh-khāni" (Taʿziyeh Performance), 594.

In the cultural osmosis of these *gūsheh* episodes, pre-Islamic and/or purely fictional topics stand side by side the Islamic-Abrahamic myths and master narratives of the Arab culture. For example, in "Binding the Demon's Toes" we learn that the Shiʿi Imam, ʿAli, is the only person in the creation who can unbind the toes of a vicious demon he had bound some 30,000 years before. Even divine figures such as Adam, Solomon and Prophet Muhammad are unable to compete with him in performing the feat of unbinding the demon. Three mortals, who happen to be the three Sunni caliphs, are also introduced in the story and verbally abused for their inability to perform what the Shiʿi Imam can do.[141] The Shiʿi Imam's ability to bind demons shows great similarity to what Persian primordial kings, Tahmūres and Jam, perform in Persian mythology.[142] Attributing mythical qualities to ʿAli has enabled him to inherit the supernatural powers of pre-Islamic kings. Reminiscent of what happened to Hossein, ʿAli is also filtered through the matrices of Persian culture to gain legitimacy as a Shiʿi sovereign.

The demon in the foregoing episode uses a grotesque mask and bizarre costumes.[143] Fascination with masked demons and jinns reintroduced these supernatural characters into the *taʿziyeh* repertoires of the nineteenth century. Sometimes the demons are harmless extras in episodes like *Suleimān va Belqeis* (King Solomon and Queen of Sheba).

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[141] For the text of "Binding the Demon's Toes" see Nāser-bakht and Kāvūsi, "Taʿsir-e Asātir-e Irāni bar Namāyesh" (Influence of Persian Mythology on Drama), 23-49. Most of the abusive comments directed at the Sunni caliphs are purged by the editors of this text.

[142] The Middle Persian Zoroastrian text, *Menōg i Khrad* (The Spriti of Wisdom), speaks of Tahmūres' harnessing the devil for 30 years. See Tafazzoli, *Menōg i Khrad*, 43. In the *Shāhnāmeh*, Tahmūres is known as *dīv-band* (demon-binder). See *Shāhnāmeh*, vol. 1/p. 36/l. 1.

[143] For a picture of this demon see Malekpur, *The Islamic Drama*, 133.

Used alongside with wild animals (in papier-mâché or live form), these demons present a non-evil variety of the demon we have in "Binding the Demon's Toes." The imagery animating the demons in these performances contributes vital topoi to the demonic representation of the Arabs in the Persian dramatic tradition in the future. From their costumes – looking uncouth and "barefooted" like "desert-dwellers"[144] – to their singing style – overlapping with the emphatic style of the "bad Arabs"[145] – the demons are closely related to the "bad Arabs" of the *taʿziyeh* performances. As we shall see in the next chapter Two, the legacy of this demonization can be perceived in the European-style theatre that will emerge in the early twentieth century in Iran.

Based on what we learn from extant accounts, using demons in mourning ceremonies was reported in Iran as early as 1908. In Sabzevār, the French Orientalist, Augustine Bricteux, reportedly came across "a group of devils on horseback, wearing yellow masks representing toads' heads and pouring dust on their heads."[146] Based on the particular color of their masks, in most likelihood, these horsemen represented a group of penitents who perpetrated the tragedy of Karbala. Portraying the "bad Arabs" in animal terms has significant precedence in the *taʿziyeh* tradition. Addresses like *sag-e ghaddār* ("disloyal dog") and *az sag kamtar* ("baser than a dog") are conventional terms of abuse for the "bad Arabs" in many *taʿziyeh* texts.[147] Shemr, the murderer of Hossein, has been the target of

[144] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 395.

[145] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 342.

[146] Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, 263.

[147] For relevant instances in the Litten collection, see Esmāʿili, *Teshneh dar Miq-ātgah* (Thirsty in the Meeting Place), 299, 304, 315 and 681.

most profound animalization ever. In one of his declaimed challenges (*rajaz-khāni*), he is made to describe himself as: "look upon me: I have seven nipples upon my chest like a dog."[148] The fact that toad is considered a demonic creature in pre-Islamic Iran tends to confirm this argument.[149]

Another type of supplementary episode contributing to the spectacularization of "bad Arabs" endeavored to recreate historical scenes adapted from biblical and/or Qurʿanic sources. Providing an occasion for magnificent displays, these episodes immersed the spectators in extravagant spectacles. The production method of these episodes (in wealthy *tekyeh*s like Tekyeh Dowlat) oftentimes demanded the mobilization of a variety of scenic resources like animals and commodities. The gold and glitter displayed in these historical recreations arguably worked in the opposite direction of engaging the spectators in the rituals of mourning. As Beizāʾī has observed, "the overwhelmingly spectacular [...] aspects of their parade erased the memory of mourning ceremonies."[150] Attracting considerable attention, these episodes have been the subject of minute descriptions by many observers.

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[148] Mamnoun, "Taʿziyeh from the Viewpoint of the Western Theatre," 166. A likely source of inspiration for these representations is the sixteenth century history of Imam Hossein's martyrdom, *Rowzat ul-Shohadā* (Meadow of Martyrs), by Hossein Vāʾez Kāshefi. According to this writer, in a dream Imam Hossein learns about his imminent death: "I saw dogs charging at me. Among them, one suffered from psoriasis and was angriest at me. I told myself that it would kill me." As a result, Shemr is always portrayed in the *taʿziyeh* texts as suffering from psoriasis (a brand of devil) which fulfills what Imam Hossein had foreseen for him in his dream. See Kāshefi, *Rowzat ul-Shohadā* (The Garden of Martyrs), 579.

[149] Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, 263.

[150] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 129.

The reports of the first American Minister to Persia, S.G.W. Benjamin (1837-1914), have eternalized these sumptuous recreations in their full glory in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Iran. Watching a series of episodes in Tekyeh Dowlat, the final performance Benjamin attends is *ʿArūsi-ye Soleimān va Belqeis* (The Wedding of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba), a *gūsheh* or supplementary episode. Commenting on the earlier performances, Benjamin refers to the superior "dramatic talent" showcased by them as they could effectively convey their message "without the aid of scenery."[151] Yet, when it comes to the recreations of Solomon's court and Queen of Sheba's retinue, Benjamin's tone shifts from the power of acting to the role of "artificial aids" (like props and scenery) in a performance: "This scene, while calling for little exhibition of dramatic talent, was very interesting as a spectacular show."[152] In a detailed passage he describes how demons, jinns and wild animals "invade the arena" of Tekyeh Dowlat from all sides to pay their respect to the legendary king. Next, a splendid retinue of richly decorated animals makes its entrance into Tekyeh Dowlat, displaying some of the most expensive commodities known to anyone. The sheer number of animals and performers; the value of the commodities they put up for display; and the use of "majestic" animals like elephants have created a sumptuous character for these historical episodes. According to Yahyā Zokāʾ, "since various resources were more readily available in Tekyeh Dowlat, [the *taʿziyeh* makers] customarily went to the extreme in decorating the stage."[153] In contrast

[151] Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, 395.

[152] Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, 402.

[153] Zokāʾ, "Tārikhcheh-ye Sākhtemān-hā-ye Arg-e Saltanati-ye Tehrān" (History of Tehran's Royal Palaces), 305.

to the austerity of traditional *taʿziyeh* performances (symbolized by the scarcity of their scenery), the material abundance in these historical episodes is truly remarkable.

The "taste for spectacle" in these episodes tends to create elaborate displays by deploying "a rhetorical mode of amplification and excess."[154] For example, if horses are used in other performances, now Queen of Sheba has to enter the Tekyeh Dowlat riding a "majestic" elephant. Similarly, Queen of Sheba marshals an awe-inspiring retinue of animals and commodities to reveal the pomp possessed by these legendary figures. The "thickening" of the texture of the narrative of Karbala by such elaborate decoration arguably speaks of a shift in cultural attention in modern Iran toward a celebration of material objects and commodities. Excessive supplementary detail in these historical recreations loads up the Karbala narrative with the anxieties of a nascent commodity culture in modern Iran.[155] Contemporary accounts indicate that these historical episodes served as "an occasion to show royal luxuries," assembled from various institutions such as the newly formed royal museum.[156] The availability of royal patronage in Tekyeh Dowlat also encouraged the *taʿziyeh* makers to use these historical recreations as a pretext to add splendor to their productions.[157] As I shall explain in the coming chapters,

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[154] I have borrowed this from Richards' discussion of the role of spectacle in Victorian exhibitions of commodities especially in the Crystal Palace. See Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 54.

[155] For a discussion of commodity culture in the Qajar period, see Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran*, 36-9.

[156] Mostowfi, *Sharh-e Zendegāni-ye Man* (Account of My Life); quoted in Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 130.

[157] The French minister to Iran, Eustache de Lorey, watched a *Taʿziyeh-ye Qāsem* (The Taʿziyeh of Qāsem) in Tekyeh Dowlat in 1907 that featured a magnificent display of Yazid's court.

emphasis on the material objects revivifying the past will re-emerge in modern European-styled theatre in Iran. In 1920s in Iran, Mirzadeh ʿEshqi's *Rastākhiz-e Salātin-e Iran* (Resurrection of the Iranian Kings; 1921; henceforth *Resurrection*) and Sadeq Hedayat's *Parvin Dokhtar-e Sāsān* (Parvin, the Daughter of Sasan; 1930, henceforth *Parvin*) started tapping into this "taste for spectacle" to revivify the specter of a pre-Islamic past. Remarkably, the Arab "other" we find in modern European-style theatre is a continuation of the legacy I have been discussing in the *taʿziyeh* tradition (see above).

Although not reported by Benjamin, another spectacular development in these historical recreations involved the introduction of what may be described as "stage machinery." The introduction of mechanical apparatuses in this type of performances speaks of the *taʿziyeh* tradition's move toward spectacular augmentation. Based on what we learn from eyewitness accounts, every year the *taʿziyeh* maker (especially in wealthy *tekyeh*s such as Tekyeh Dowlat) tried to outdo the pageantry and spectacle they had mounted in the previous years. One way to do so was to capitalize on the supernatural elements of the *taʿziyeh* texts. Angels, demons and jinns offered a potential for the *taʿziyeh* makers to show off their inventiveness by engineering fascinating spectacles. In order to do so, they developed contraptions that, for example, could enable the archangel Gabriel to hover in the air or the wedding canopy (*hejleh*) of the Queen of Sheba to descend from the heavens by a group of angels. From a historical perspective, in the early *taʿziyeh* performances, a simple convention announced Gabriel's descent from the

According to Būlūkbāshi, no text of this *taʿziyeh* includes a reference to Yazid; in most likelihood, "by introducing Yazid's spectacular court the *taʿziyeh* maker wished to increase the splendor and importance of his performance." See Būlūkbāshi, *Taʿziyeh-khāni*, 138.

heavens: "Gabriel would suddenly appear from behind the platform or a passageway in the *tekyeh* and rush to the scene."[158] In other instances, when Gabriel was supposed to deliver revelation, the performer personifying the archangel hid on the roof or an upper gallery of the *tekyeh.* This meant that Gabriel's words were coming from the heavens.[159] As time passed, these angelic interventions became a locus for the *taʿziyeh* makers to craft extraordinary spectacles comparable to what Persian travelers had observed in European theatres and opera-houses. Eyewitness accounts shed light on the developments involved in "staging" these supernatural activities. These accounts highlight the mechanical expertise that enabled the supernatural entities to traverse the space between the platform and the roof of the *tekyeh* which stood for the invisible world (*ʿālam-e gheib*).

Based on one account, Gabriel (who is by now equipped with a number of accessories like feathers and wings) "was hoisted from the roof of the *tekyeh* by a rope that was connected to a pulley or catapult (*qerqereh ya manjaliq*)."[160] Another innovation involved a box that could travel in the air: "with the equipment they had put into place, houris could travel between the roof and the platform, using boxes that moved on wire."[161] Such mechanical wizardry undoubtedly enthralled spectators as these were the earliest examples of "special effects" in Persian dramatic tradition. The novelties the spectators observed in Tekyeh Dowlat must have brought to their minds the *simiyā va limiyā va*

[158] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 336.

[159] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 337.

[160] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 337.

[161] Shāhʿalizādegān, *Emkānāt-e Fanni dar Teʾātr* (Technical Potentials in Theatre), 118. For a similar description of this box see Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 368.

khāb va khiyāl ("magic, dream and illusion") Mirza Abu Tāleb had observed in Europe. The motivation behind these spectacles was apparently to inspire awe and amazement in the spectators. As a master architect in charge of making one of these contraptions recollects, "the sound of the applause and amazement of the spectators could be heard" when they saw Gabriel descending from the heavens in a box moving on wires.[162] Taking up the characteristics of spectacle, these visually captivating displays arguably made the mourners self-conscious about the material aspects of the *taʿziyeh* performances. The resultant primacy of visual codes over the ritualistic content of these spectacles instituted a separation between the performers and the spectators. Mechanical malfunctions and unexpected circumstances marred these spectacles with unlucky outcomes. Oftentimes we hear that the performers riding the flying boxes fall or the apparatuses they use break down.[163] The laughter these mishaps provoked additionally militated against the spectators' immersion in the ritualistic aspects of these mourning practices.[164] All in all, the spectacular novelties Qajar patrons introduced in the repertoire of *taʿziyeh*

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[162] Hosseini, *Tārikh-e Tehrān*, vol. 2, 118 (quoted in Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Iran* [Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran], 368).

[163] For two incidents, see Shāhʿalizādegān, *Emkānāt-e Fanni dar Teʾātr* (Technical Potentials of Theatre in Iran), 118; and Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Iran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 368-69.

[164] Here we can also refer to the use of "majestic" animals (lions and elephants) for producing grand effects as it sometimes resulted in similar distancing effects. Based on an account by Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, once the *taʿziyeh* makers in Tekyeh Dowlat used an elephant to show off the glory of Queen of Sheba. However, "when she was about to dismount, the elephant went berserk and took the bride out of the *tekyeh*. Laughter broke out. I rose and got back home. I don't like these actions at all." See Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, *Khāterāt* (Recollections), 517.

performances in the latter half of the nineteenth century resulted in Tekyeh Dowlat's becoming more of a *tamāshā-khāneh* ("theatre" or lit. "house of spectacles") like European opera-houses than a *namāyesh-khāneh* ("performance hall") as it was presumably meant to be. As we shall see in the next chapter, demand for spectacle in the nineteenth century will have a highly detrimental effect on the representation of Arabs in the European-style theatre in Iran.

If the historical episodes made opulent spectacles and awe-inspiring "special effects" the order of the day in Tekyeh Dowlat, the so-called *shabih-e mozhek* ("comical performance") introduced comical elements into *taʿziyeh* repertoires. These humorous performances capitalized on a range of religious mythology other than the ones relating to the incidents of Karbala to cater to the "taste for spectacle" already prevalent in the Qajar culture. The "humor, buffoonery and farcicality" (*hazl u maskhareh u mazhakeh*)[165] that characterize these performances separates them from the rest of the supplementary episodes added to the narrative of Karbala as no other performance inter-mingles elements of comedy with the somber mood of Moharram ceremonies. By focusing on a character who is sometimes tangentially related to the Karbala events, episodes like *ʿArūsi-raftan-e Fatemeh Zahrā* (Fatemeh Zahra Goes to a Wedding), *Amir Teimūr va Vāli-ye Shām* (Tamerlane and the Governor of Levant) and *Māliyāt J̌amʿ-kardan-e Moʿein ul-Bokāʿ* (Moʿin ul-Bokāʿ Collecting Tax from Taʿziyeh) introduced comical renditions in the *taʿziyeh* repertoires.

[165] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran*, 139.

In the early comical performances, comedy tends to be separate from the tragedy. Unlike Western tragicomedies that freely intermingle the two moods, *shabih-e mozhek* must follow culturally appropriate measures in Iran. For example, it has to avoid putting the holy figures in what may be perceived as "irreverent" (comical) contexts. The result has been described as a "comedy of situation" in which laughter is created by ludicrous circumstances and not necessarily by comic characters.[166] With the growing popularity of these comedic episodes in Tekyeh Dowlat, a new space was opened up in the Moharram performances to entertain "laughing and making others laugh" (*khandidan va khandāndan*).[167] The laughter these comedic episodes provoked during the mourning month of Moharram attracted much criticism. The Qajar dignitary, Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, blamed royal patronage for encouraging the "vulgarity" of these episodes:

> Last night "Fatemeh Zahra Goes to a Wedding" was performed in the Tekyeh. This *taʿziyeh* has become vulgar (*razl*). It was especially vulgar last night. The performers were howling like dogs. What was particularly shameful was that the laughter of the members of the harem came from the galleries to the platform and people who were there said it was funnier than any Western playhouse.[168]

The ambivalence of the Islamic scholars or *ʿulamā* toward the Moharram ceremonies further encouraged criticisms like the one quoted above. Historically speaking, some

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[166] Malekpūr, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Iran* (Dramatic Literature in Iran), vol. 1, 262.

[167] Baktāsh, *Teʾātr-e Irāni* (Persian Theatre), 10.

[168] Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, *Khāterāt* (Recollections), 132. The translation is partially based on Malekpūr, *The Islamic Drama*, 88. The "vulgarity" of this episode seemingly grew over time. In another comment, belonging to over a decade later, Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh denounced this same performance for "irreverently" dressing Fatemeh in a "European dress and a bonnet." See Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, *Khāterāt* (Recollections), 517.

ʿulamā have endorsed the *taʿziyeh* performances mostly due to their power of inducing weeping among the believers.[169] On the contrary, some other *ʿulamā* have conflated the *taʿziyeh* performances with certain "unorthodox" practices in Moharram processions (like self-mortification and public nudity) and have disapproved of them entirely. The latter group usually "expressed their opinions indirectly and cautiously in the form of terms and conditions" they declared for aspects of *taʿziyeh* performances.[170] For example, they questioned the philosophy of representation (*tashbih*) in such enactments or criticized their using musical instruments and singing.[171] Some prominent *ʿulamā* even reportedly went so far as asking Naser ud-Din Shah to either shut down Tekyeh Dowlat or put a stop to its comedic performances.[172]

One way for the *taʿziyeh* makers to keep the comedy alive and avoid criticism was to mount satirical performances about the perceived "enemies of religion" (Shiʿism). Bombarding their subjects with sarcasm, these performances created exhilarating shows by relying on the potentials of lampoon and derision.[173] According to Beizāʾī, these episodes "not only satisfied the people [for the entertainment they provided] but also

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[169] For the religious decrees issued in favor of *taʿziyeh* tradition, see "Fatāwā-ye ʿUlamā-ye Salaf" (Previous Ayatollah's Decrees), 291-301; and Humāyūni, *Taʿziyeh dar Iran* (Taʿziyeh in Iran), 61-9.

[170] Mahjūb, *Nashriyeh-ye Jashn-e Honar* (Publication of Art festival), 12 (quoted in Humāyūni, "Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni" [Taʿziyeh and Its Performance], 17).

[171] For a list of religious opinion issued in opposition to the *taʿziyeh* tradition, see Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 120.

[172] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Tehran), 136-7.

[173] Humāyūni, *Taʿziyeh dar Iran* (Taʿziyeh in Iran), 320.

they were like a bribe to the *ʿulamā* so that they would not stop these performances."[174] Among the characters that were usually satirized, two tend to stand out: Imam ʿAli's assassin, ibn Moljam, and the second Sunni caliph, ʿOmar ibn Khattāb. For instance, in *Taʿziyeh-ye ibn Muljam* (Taʿziyeh of ibn Muljam), Imam ʿAli's assassin was paraded around "like a clown in red tatters."[175] Renounced for his sins, the *taʿziyeh* makers used ibn Muljam to mount entertaining shows that were "almost entirely given to satire, of a generally farcical type."[176] In a similar manner, the burlesque performance *Taʿziyeh-ye ʿOmar* (Taʿziyeh of ʿOmar) lampooned the Sunni caliph, along with his entourage of demons and the Devil, creating an entertaining show. These satirical episodes provided an opportunity for the *taʿziyeh* makers to introduce new characters into the repertoire of Moharram performances. The fact that ibn Muljam and ʿOmar are unrelated to the story of Karbala indicates a new trend in the latter half of the nineteenth century in which *kernel* plot components (such as Imam Hossein's martyrdom) are receding to the background to open up a space for *satellite* plot components (such as the assassination of Imam ʿAli). This development had a direct impact on the representation of the Sunni caliph ʿOmar who, as we shall see, will emerge as a scapegoat in burlesque shows.

These satirical episodes for the first time allowed professional comical troupes – *lūti-hā-ye motreb u taqlīd-chi u maskhareh* (musicians, comedians and buffoons)[177] – to personify the "enemies of religion." A renowned comical performer was Qanbar, also

[174] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 162.

[175] Humāyūni, *Taʿziyeh dar Iran* (Taʿziyeh in Iran), 349.

[176] Yarshater, "Development of Persian Drama," 25.

[177] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 165.

known as Imam ʿAli's Slave, an Ethiopian slave who spoke Persian with an accent.[178] Qanbar's funny antics opened up a new space for comedy even in serious performances.[179] Another well-known comical performer was Esmāʿil Bazzāz (lit. "Ishmael the textile seller") whose status as court jester enabled him to mount comical performances in the Tekyeh Dowlat.[180] These satirical performances mark an important moment in the evolution of the *taʿziyeh* tradition as they relegated the "bad Arabs" to the realm of clowns and buffoons. As Shahidi has observed, the *taʿziyeh* makers' bias against the perceived enemies of Shiʿism made them "de-emphasize" the roles of "bad Arabs" by portraying them as "frivolous and buffoon-like."[181] Stripping them of the role they had played in the narrative of Islam, this "de-emphasis" ended up portraying the "bad Arabs" as caricatures of the dreaded figures they used to be historically speaking. As much as the "good Arabs" are larger than life in these texts, a character like ʿOmar is "elevated to mythic status in his role as the scorned scapegoat."[182] This strategy of dichotomization arguably reflected the rhetorical force of Shiʿi-Sunni polarization that pervaded the Persian culture during the Safavid era.

[178] Beizāʾī, *Namāyesh dar Iran* (Drama in Iran), 161.

[179] Oskūʾī, *Tārikh-e Teʾātr-e Iran* (History of Persian Theatre), 76.

[180] Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, *Khāterāt* (Recollections), 591.

[181] Shahidi, "Literary and Musical Developments in the Taziyeh," 42-3.

[182] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Tradition*, 206.

Taʿziyeh of ʿOmar: Where Cursing Rituals and Comedy Converge

This performance is rooted in a long tradition that goes back to the anti-Sunni promulgations of the so-called *tabarrāʾiyān* corps of the seventeenth century.[183] As the official agents of the Safavid kings, this corps of professional disavowers was "known for their roles as promoters and guardians of the ritual curse in Iranian society."[184] Used as a tool to propagate the Safavid kings' new Shiʿi faith, the *tabarrāʾiyān* were entrusted with the task of upholding the institution of ritual cursing of the Sunni caliphs. Over time, this corps reportedly became "the shah's instruments for implementing policies directed against the Sunni community" at large.[185] As Abisaab has observed about the Safavids, "the public cursing of Sunnism was an effective tool for setting sharper boundaries between Sunnism and Shiʿism. It made allegiance to the latter almost inconceivable without a rejection of the former."[186] By the latter half of the sixteenth century the institution of *tabarrāʾ* had started to fade away but its legacy was passed on to the larger Shiʿi population. This is the time when the caliph ʿOmar emerges as an object of scorn and a scapegoat for the Shiʿi population.[187]

Various rituals and practices gave vent to the animosity the Shiʿi public harbored for the Sunni caliph. For example, certain leather-makers are said to have etched ʿOmar's

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[183] The name of this corps derives from the Arabic root *tabarrāʾ* (to disavow). The *tabarrāʾiyān* were professional disavowers.

[184] Stanfield-Johnson, "The Tabarraʾiyan and the Early Safavids," 48.

[185] Stanfield-Johnson, "Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran," 125.

[186] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 27.

[187] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Traditions*, 196.

name under the shoes they made, or certain carpet makers reportedly wove the caliph's name in the carpets so that believers could trample it, or some bricklayers are said to have chanted curses against ʿOmar every time they laid a brick.[188] But by far the most entertaining and spectacular practice involved the annual burning of ʿOmar in effigy. This bizarre ritual combined scapegoating ceremonies with a collective desire for merrymaking. The fusion of piety and entertainment gave rise to a festival of anti-Sunnism.

Believed to complement the mourning months of Moharram and Safar, the burning of ʿOmar in effigy ushered a period of merrymaking known as *ʿEid-e ʿOmar-Koshān* ("Festival of Killing ʿOmar"). Calling it *ʿEid-e Khandeh* ("Festival of Laughter"), the Qajar dignitary, Abdullah Mustowfi, has asserted that "after two months of mourning and wailing, the people needed to laugh a little bit."[189] The occasion they chose to do this was the day the second Sunni caliph was believed to have been murdered by his Persian slave, Firūz Abu Luʾluʾ.[190] Nicknamed Bābā Shojāʿ ul-Din ("the brave of religion"), the Persian slave was honored by the festival for supposedly defending the religion by bravely murdering the caliph.

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[188] For a list of such practices reported by European travelers, see Floor, *History of Theatre in Iran*, 203-5.

[189] Mustowfi, *Sharh-e Zendegāni-ye Man* (An Account of My Life), 319.

[190] The eminent Shiʿi scholar, Muhammad Bāqer Majlesi, (1616–1698), apparently moved the date of ʿOmar's assassination, from the end of the Muslim calendar (26 Zulhajjeh) to a date close to the end of the mourning ceremonies (9 Rabiʿ ul-Awwal), so that it may provide an occasion for a "festival of laughter." See Floor, *The History of Theatre in Iran*, 204.

Several European travelers have recorded their observations of public desecration of ʿOmar in effigy in Iran. One of the earliest accounts belongs to a Russian merchant named Kotov who witnessed it in 1624 in Isfahan: "they lead the effigy of a man made of skin and stuffed with straw, with bow and quiver and arrows made of pine slivers seated upon an ass, and on his head a helmet with five fingers; they support him from the sides, so that he may not fall, and they curse him and spit upon him."[191] The objectification of the Sunni caliph as a repulsive spectacle is paramount in this ritual. Made clumsily from straw, ʿOmar is tamed for display as the believers manipulate his effigy and revile it with a litany of profanity. The role ʿOmar plays in this festival is reminiscent of the role "ritual monsters" play in scapegoat ceremonies. As David Gilmore has observed in his study of monsters in different cultures, ritual monsters are "scary effigies or statues used in public festivities: figures of horrible mien that are brought out to frighten or to instruct people."[192] The participants in the European reports tend to be undeterred by the supposedly frightening mien of such a dreaded figure like ʿOmar. They appear instead to be deriving joy from using this "ritual monster" as an object of entertainment. As we shall see, the troping of the Arab "other" in monstrous terms will continue to enjoy a currency in the Persian literature in the time to come.

Several other European travelers have recorded similar observations about the celebration of ʿOmar's death in the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century in Iran.[193] In some of these reports the ritual of scapegoating ʿOmar was integrated into different forms of

[191] Kemp, *Russian Travellers*, 32 (quoted in Floor, *History of Theatre in Iran*, 205).

[192] Gilmore, *Monsters*, 155.

[193] See the texts discussed in Floor, *The History of Theatre in Iran*, 203-12.

secular entertainment (*bāzi*). For example, in a report belonging to 1852, a Persian prince in Shiraz is said to have organized "a great public feast" for killing ʿOmar in effigy, "the harmony of which was enlivened by the humane spectacle of sundry bullfights, besides feats of jugglers and ropedancers, with fireworks at night."[194]

As scapegoating ʿOmar grew in popularity, its ritual started being augmented with spectacular paraphernalia. For instance, in 1802 an English traveler observed that the effigy had been "disfigured and deformed" so that it would look more like a monster.[195] Grotesque embellishments like "a necklace made of dry cow patties, and bracelets made of sheep-dung pellets" were used to intensify the effigy's monstrous mien.[196] Once the participants were done with the ritual cursing, they proceeded to smash the effigy into pieces. The prize for this symbolic aggression was the sweetmeats and bonbons that poured out from the inside of the effigy. These prizes were then "devoured by the mob who attended the ceremony."[197] Another favored augmentation involved burning the effigy at night along with fireworks.[198] This topped off the spectacular effect of *cherāghāni* ("illuminations") that were used in nocturnal festivities in Iran.[199]

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[194] Binning, *A Journal*, vol. 1, 429.

[195] Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz*, 42.

[196] Beeman, *Iranian Performance Traditions*, 206.

[197] Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz*, 42. In a similar scenario, the inside of the effigy was filled with bunches of grape. Then, "someone ran the effigy through at the waist with a sword and the party drank the dripping grape juice, proclaiming 'We are thirsty for the blood of ʿOmar.'" See Stanfield-Johnson, "Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran," 128.

[198] Floor, *The History of Theatre in Iran*, 207.

[199] For illuminations especially during the Safavid and Qajar eras see *Encyclopedia of Iranica*, s.v., "Cherāghāni."

A final development, which is especially important for my study, involved the gradual theatricalization of the ritual of killing ʿOmar. In early 1830s the Scottish traveler, Alexander Burnes, came across a dangling effigy in a street in Mashhad which was said to represent the Sunni caliph ʿOmar. Side by side the effigy, Burnes noticed a remarkable scene: "a real exhibition of a man [personifying ʿOmar] suspended from a beam laid across the street, and that, too, in a blaze of light. How the contrivance was made I did not discover; for he had a rope round his neck, and kicked and acted to reality. As the crowed gazed."[200] The ritual of killing ʿOmar in effigy is dramatized realistically here by what seems to be a staged lynching of the Sunni caliph as a would-be criminal. Using a live performer to personify the effigy is a step toward the theatricalization of what Kotov had observed some two hundred years before in Shiraz. What Burnes witnessed in Mashhad approximates a *tableau vivant* since it reenacts a symbolic ritual in live performance. The spectacular effect of this scene was enhanced by the use of illuminations as the *tableau* was produced "in a blaze of light." The gazing crowd may also show the institutionalization of such collective displays as consuming spectacles has become a pastime. Later observations by European travelers tend to corroborate this trend. In a report belonging to 1886 we find perhaps one of the most elaborately theatricalized versions of what the other European travelers have observed. The comical episode described in this report, entitled *Taʿziyeh-ye ʿOmar* (Taʿziyeh of ʿOmar), was performed at the house of a Qajar prince on the occasion of the festival of killing ʿOmar in effigy:

[200] Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara*, vol. 3, 85-6.

> Over the hauz or tank which is seen in every decent house in Persia stood a platform, some four feet high. [A Jewish band is playing a loud music.] Before each group of buffoons, or Jews, was a bottle of spirits or wine, and a brass drinking-cup. […] A lūti (professional buffoon) attired as a burlesque of a moollah, or priest, ascends the stage. He solemnly curses Omar; he takes off the peculiar habits of the Mahommedan priest amid shouts of laughter: […] he preaches a comic sermon. The music strikes up again, and the procession of actors makes its circuit around the crowded courtyard, Omar himself leading a dog, the type of defilement. And such a dog: one of the street pariah, which, un-used to the leash, howls dismally and tries to bite! Then come his followers, all riding on asses. Then, angels and demons; last of all the Sheitan, or "Old Nick" himself: a gruesome devil with horns, nude to the waist, painted in black spots, and yellow face, and white round eyes and mouth. The climax is to be the descent of Omar and the Sheitan to regions below. All ascend the platform. Omar makes a speech; he dines; at the suggestion of the devil he gets very drunk; the fun grows fast and furious. Omar dances; his attendants, angels, demons, buffoons, all dance. And now came a sudden and unexpected finale. We have noted that the temporary stage was over a tank of water. Crash – in an instant Omar and his crew, Jews, lūtis, dog, and devil, are all precipitated into the tank.[201]

The satirical performance described above effectively incorporates the lessons *taʿziyeh* makers learned at royal *tekyeh*s especially Tekyeh Dowlat. The extravagance and ostentation displayed by the patron here is arguably catering to the royal "taste for spectacle" Naser ud-Din Shah cultivated in the performances and pageantries of Tekyeh Dowlat. The use of opulent costumes (borrowed from the family of the prince) replicates the custom of the shah's family providing luxurious costumes for grand productions.[202] Using angels, demons and the Devil follows the trend popularized by the *gūsheh* episodes in Tekyeh Dowlat that used supernatural characters for spectacular effects. The grotesque

[201] Wills, *Persia as It Is*, 220.

[202] When the performers finally fall in the pool, the ladies inside the prince's house start complaining about their expensive garments being damaged by the tank water. See Wills, *Persia as It Is*, 221.

costumes of the Devil must have fascinated the spectators, adding to the success of the show as spectacular entertainment. The "unexpected finale" of the performance arguably attempts to approximate the type of stage wizardry Persian travelers described in their accounts of trips to European destinations. Letting the planks give way at a specific moment resembles a rudimentary version of a trapdoor. This may be considered as an early example of European influence on the *taʿziyeh* tradition in Iran where a stage technique commonly found in European theatre is copied to spectacularize the Persian indigenous dramatic tradition. Based on this potential similarity, it may be surmised that the accounts of Persian travelers enjoyed a degree of popularity among the *taʿziyeh* makers (or their patrons) resulting in the introduction of fascinating innovations like the one described above. The show's success in dramatizing ʿOmar's descent into hell relies greatly on the novelty of this stage technique.

Performances like *Taʿziyeh of ʿOmar* turned the institution of *tabarrā'* into a national pastime by capitalizing on its comical potentials. If once a corps of professional disavowers was required to promote and guarantee the practice of cursing, now certain religious amusements helped mainstreaming anti-Sunnism in the Persian culture. By playing on the audience's desire for merrymaking, satirical performances like *Taʿziyeh of ʿOmar* helped in making anti-Sunni practices an entertaining pastime.

With the popularity of comedic episodes in the month of Moharram, new shows were developed to create ludicrous spectacles by capitalizing on the misfortunes of the "enemies of religion." In episodes like *Taʿziyeh-ye Mokhtār* (Taʿziyeh of Mokhtār) the "helplessness and desperation, fear and abjection" (*zabūni va darmāndegi va tars va*

heqārat) of the murderers of Imam Hossein are depicted "in a comical manner."[203] The punishment of the "bad Arabs" gave rise to a series of performances in which revenge doubles as comical entertainment. The sweet taste of revenge was enlivened by the buffooneries of the comical performers. The assimilation of this type of religious amusement into other national pastimes further increased its relevance as a legitimate form of merrymaking. So it was not a coincidence that the burning of ʿOmar in effigy was "harmonized" over time with other national pastimes like bullfighting, juggling and rope-dancing. As Hāji Sayyāh has noted, the fun-loving Persians "dressed an amusement [i.e., *taʿziyeh* performances] in a religious garb" (*yek tafrih ra lebās-e mazhabi pūshāni-deh*) to compensate for the lack of amusements and diversions in the Iranian society.[204]

At the heart of entertaining performances like *Taʿziyeh of ʿOmar* is a detrimental process of cultural "othering". ʿOmar, who has come to embody anything despised in orthodox Shiʿism, is cast in such performances as the archenemy of Imam ʿAli, who represents the ideal Shiʿi hero. Many *taʿziyeh* texts have rarefied this perceived opposition as universal truth. A text that has capitalized on this opposition is *Ghasb-e Bāgh-e Fadak* ("Usurpation of Fadak Garden") which tells the story of ʿOmar's usurpation of a garden supposed to belong to Fatemeh, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad. The character of

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[203] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (Taʿziyeh and Its Performance in Iran), 280. Mokhtār as-Saghafi (622-87) was a cousin of the Umayyad caliph, Muʿāwiyyah. After the battle of Karbala, he revolted against the caliph to support the followers of ʿAli. His punishment of the perpetrators of the Karbala tragedy is described in many performances which constitute a niche in the *taʿziyeh* repertoires. For Mokhtār see *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd edition) s.v., "al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd."

[204] Haji Sayyāh, *Khāterāt* (Recollections), 92.

ʿOmar in this text is interlaced with evil traits like cunning and chicanery as he seeks every opportunity to plot against ʿAli. At one point ʿOmar is even made to confess his hatred of the Shiʿi hero by telling him: "Stop talking as it's our time to rule / hatred of Mortezā [the title of ʿAli] will be in our hearts up to the end of time" (*Kam kon sokhan zamān-e khelāfat az ān-e māst / tā rūz-e hashr bar del-e mā kīn-e Mortezāst*).[205] Even Abu Bakr, the first Sunni caliph, pleads to ʿOmar to "stop harassing the Prophet's Holy Family" (*biyā va dast ze āzār-e Ahl-e Beit bardār*).[206] Remarkably, ʿOmar's murder by his Persian slave is described here as a punishment for what he has done.[207] Fatemeh's prophecy – *ʿomr nabini ʿOmar* ("ʿOmar, you may not live long") – is backed up by ʿAli's prediction that ʿOmar shall be slayed by a "poisoned dagger" (*halāk-e khanjar-e zahr-āb-dār khāhad shod*).[208] Finally, as we have come to expect from the *taʿziyeh* texts, the ultimate move in the vilification of ʿOmar as the archetypal "bad Arab" involves his animalization. The text of *Ghasb-e Bāgh-e Fadak* is peppered with tropings of ʿOmar in animal terms. Addresses like *ei sag-e nādān* ("you ignorant dog"), *ayā molhed-e ze sag kamtar* ("you apostate who are baser than a dog"), or *ei sag-e malʿūn* ("you damned dog") are a few examples among many others.[209] The regularity with which these curses occur in this text points to the role *taʿziyeh* performances played in accommodating the

[205] Eqbāl, *Jong-e Shahādat* (Anthology of Martyrdom), 79.

[206] Eqbāl, *Jong-e Shahādat* (Anthology of Martyrdom), 96. In Shiʿi texts, Abu Bakr is usually forgiven but ʿOmar gets the lion's share of verbal abuse.

[207] The Shiʿi Imam ʿAli's assasin, ibn Moljam Moradi (d. 661), is also believed to be of Persian origin. I thank Dr. Fatemeh Keshavarz for noting this.

[208] Eqbāl, *Jong-e Shahādat* (Anthology of Martyrdom), 79.

[209] Eqbāl, *Jong-e Shahādat* (Anthology of Martyrdom), 78, 86 and 74, respectively.

institution of cursing of the Sunni caliphs. The dog that is led by ʿOmar in the satirical performance described above is meant to characterize the caliph in animal terms. Once animalized, the Sunni caliph fails to attract any sympathy when his effigy is burned by the Shiʿi population as an entertaining pastime.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the "other" for the Shiʿi culture in Iran comprised of an ambivalent category because political rivalry between the Safavids and the Ottoman Empire had added Ottoman Turks and Uzbeks to the cast of "bad Arabs" who had martyred Imam Hossein. The only things this pantheon of "others" had in common was their religion (Sunnism) and their political rivalry with an expanding Safavid Empire. As we shall see in the next chapter, this ambivalence was reduced in favor of an *ethnic* "other" who was resolved to destroy the Persian "nation". This was when the ideology of modern Persian nationalism replaced a religious conceptualization of the Self and "Otherness" with a racial anthropological one. The newly conceptualized Arab "other" no longer comes from the battle of Karbala; instead, he comes from the battle of Qādesiyyeh (636) which marks the downfall of the last Persian dynasty, the Sasanians. Strikingly, the much-demonized Sunni faith of this new "other" was actively forgotten in the new Iranian nation. Although the emergence of the discourse of "othering" I investigate in this chapter was not one man's will (communal authorship), yet the policies of Iran's new monarch, Reza Shah (r. 1925-41), who did not wish to weaken his relationship with such a powerful Sunni neighbor as Turkey, was not without its effects in this regard.

Chapter Two: Mirzādeh ʿEshqi and Invention of the Arab "Other"

The early decades of the twentieth century in Iran may be considered a turning point in the history of *taʿziyeh* tradition. As the nineteenth century came to an end, the fortunes of this vibrant dramatic tradition started to dwindle too. This state of affairs was the result of complex sociopolitical factors. On February 24, 1921 the future monarch of Iran, Reza Shah (*r.* 1925-1941), issued a decree banning any type of public congregation in the country. Although the popular Shiʿi performances were not mentioned by name here, yet Item Six of this decree prohibited any activity or pastime that required people's congregating:

> All pubs, playhouses, movie theatres, photo ateliers and gambling clubs must be closed; and any drunk person [found in these places] shall be court marshalled.[210]

This ban brought to its knees an institution that for centuries had nurtured the Shiʿi culture in Iran, enabling it to espouse its core principles and, at the same time, defy its perceived enemies.[211] As we saw in the previous chapter, the *taʿziyeh* performances served the Safavid and then the Qajar dynasties as an instrument for religious indoctrination and political legitimation. It was this institution that gave those dynasties the artillery they needed to wage a rhetorical war against their Sunni adversaries; a war

[210] For the text of this decree, see Malekpūr, *Adabiyāt-e Namāyeshi dar Irān* (Dramatic Literature in Iran) vol. 3, 15.

[211] We know that *taʿziyeh* performances did not perish altogether at this time. They only ceased to be performed in big cities and continued a modest and unspectacular existence in the rural areas.

that sometimes morphed into grotesque scapegoating practices like the Festival of Killing ʿOmar in effigy (discussed in the previous chapter).

Nevertheless, Reza Shah's decree was not the sole reason behind the deterioration of Persian indigenous dramatic tradition in Iran by the turn of the twentieth century.[212] An increasing exposure to European novelties, especially theatre and opera, diminished patronage for religious ceremonies in Iran as the Persian elite no longer found interest in patronizing the performances and pageantries related to the mourning month of Moharram.[213] The zeitgeist had started to change and championing secular European plays and operas had become the order of the day among the Persian elite. From a historical standpoint, the institution of *taʿziyeh* was co-opted by the Shiʿi dynasties in Iran to craft their identity. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the transcendental mythos at the heart of that identity gradually was losing its relevance in modern Iran; and so did the *taʿziyeh* performances.[214]

As was mentioned above, the gradual demise of the *taʿziyeh* performances was presaged by a growing awareness about European theatre and opera in Iran. This familiarity appeared to have an adverse effect on the Persian intelligentsia as they started to champion the abandonment of that tradition, or tried to make it adopt traits that were ontologically foreign to it. As I tried to explain in the previous chapter, the demand for

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[212] For a general discussion of the social and religious factors resulting in the banning of the *taʿziyeh* performances under Reza Shah see Homāyūni's "Cherā Taʿziyeh-khāni Mamnūʿ Shod" (Why the *Taʿziyeh* Performances Were Banned?)

[213] Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, 20.

[214] For a discussion of the incompatibility of the *taʿziyeh* tradition and modern life in Iran see Bulūkbāshi, *Taʿziyeh-khāni* (*Taʿziyeh* Performances), 76-84.

the Persian indigenous tradition to mimic European plays opened up a supplementary space in the *taʿziyeh* performances, called *gūsheh* ("corner") in Persian, to accommodate splendid spectacles and even some comedic contents. The European observers who attended Tekyeh Dowlat compared its "extraordinary spectacles" to what colossal venues like the amphitheater of Verona had given the world in terms of theatrical spectacle.[215] Some others compared the "corner" episodes they saw at the royal Tekyeh Dowlat to the funniest plays they had seen in European playhouses.[216]

With the downfall of Qajar dynasty in 1925, Tekyeh Dowlat lost its preeminence as a royal amphitheater but continued to be used as a space for staging important state spectacles. It was here that the Founder's Assembly convened on October 31, 1925 to entrust the government to Reza Khan Pahlavi, which eventually provided the grounds for his investment with dynastic sovereignty as the shah of Iran.[217] It is remarkable how Iran's new monarch still had to resort to age-old Qajar ceremonials and spaces of legitimacy to stage his political sovereignty.[218] Before being demolished in the 1940s so that the newly founded National Bank may be built in its place, the well-known Qajar performance hall was used as a space for the exhibition of commodities that were manufactured in Iran (*amtaʿeh-ye vatani*).[219] The repurposing of this iconically Shiʿi

[215] Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, 282-6.

[216] See Eʿtemād us-Saltaneh, *Khāterāt* (Recollections), 132.

[217] Ansari, *Modern Iran*, 45-6.

[218] The eminent Zoroastrian benefactor and politician, Arbāb Keikhosrow (1875-1940), was in charge of renovating Tekyeh Dowlat (after a long period of neglect and disrepair) so that it may be used for this important event. See Tahmāsbi, *Tārikh-e Shāhanshāhi* (Royal History), 431-32.

[219] Shahidi, *Taʿziyeh va Taʿziyeh-khāni dar Tehran* (*Taʿziyeh* and Its Performance in Tehran), 207.

building was arguably driven by a shift in the official ideology of rapidly modernizing Iran. Such a radical repurposing was the harbinger of a new era of secularization where an emergent commodity culture tend to replace the metanarratives of Shiʿi faith.[220]

As the *taʿziyeh* tradition lost its relevance in modern Iran, European-style theatre and opera filled its place almost seamlessly. The novelty of the theatrical/operatic mode and the popularity it enjoyed among the Persian elite helped this transition to occur with relative ease. With the arrival of the new art forms, significant changes were also introduced in the notions of Self and "Other" in the Persian culture. As I shall explain shortly, the emergence of European-style theatre in Iran had a detrimental impact on the representation of Arabs in the Persianate literature. If once, the identity of the "other" for the Shiʿi culture in Iran consisted simultaneously of Arab Umayyads, Ottoman Turks and Uzbeks, in 1920s and 1930s that ambivalence was resolved in favor of an *ethnic* "other" who was sworn to destroy not the Shiʿi faith but the Persian "nation". This was particularly the time when an emergent ideology of modern Persian nationalism was replacing religious conceptualizations of "otherness" in Iran with a racial anthropological one. As a result, in his new incarnation, the "Semite Arab" was no longer defined by the existential threat he may have posed for the Shiʿi faith. Yet, despite the shift, the new discourse of "othering" was still ideologically tied to the discourse we have found in the *taʿziyeh* performances. Remarkably, the new discourse of "othering" in modern Iran was similarly driven by the trauma of a major military defeat. This time it was the battle of

[220] An extreme example of this shift was reported by a contemporary historian who described repurposing Tekyeh Dowlat as an act of exorcism, which "evicted the demon of hatred and wickedness from this building." See Tahmāsbi, *Tārikh-e Shāhanshāhi* (Royal History), 430.

Qādesiyyeh (636 CE) which had come to occupy a central position in the modern nationalist narrative.[221] The trauma of the defeat at the battle of Qādesiyyeh appears to share great similarities with the traumatic events that characterize the Shiʿi narrative of Karbala. In the repertoire of nationalist texts that emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century in Iran, the much-reviled Sunni faith of this "Semite Arab" was consigned to a collective amnesia. The newly imagined identity of the Arab "other" at this time mainly cohered around his ethnic (and not religious) differences. This was arguably in part because the new monarch, Reza Shah, did not wish to weaken his ties with Iran's powerful Sunni neighbor, Turkey.[222] Reza Shah's downplaying the two nations' religious differences brought Persian culture's preoccupations with the Sunni faith of its "other" to a halt.

The new discourse of "othering" that was outlined above found a paradigmatic expression in 1920s in the works of revolutionary poet and journalist, Mirzādeh ʿEshqi (1894-1924). In his *Kafan-e Siyāh* (The Black Shroud, 1917), for example, we find representations of Arabs not as transgressors against the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-beit*) but as purported destroyers of Iran's pre-Islamic civilization. This drastic shift was

[221] The defeat of the Sasanian army in the battle of Qādisiyyah finally opened the gates of Iran to the invading Muslim Arabs. The site of this battle is known as al-Madāʾen or Ctesiphon. For a detailed account of the battle, see al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 12. For the representations of this battle in Arabic and Persian texts, see Lewental, *Qādisiyyah, Then and Now*.

[222] Marashi, "Performing the Nation," 102.

arguably inspired by the xenophobic tendencies of modern Persian nationalism that flourished during the formative years of ʿEshqi's career (1920s).[223]

One of the striking aspects of the literature I will examine in this chapter is that ʿEshqi who devoted his life to resisting England's colonial advances toward Iran ended up mobilizing an equally detrimental discourse against the Arabs. Recognizing the seventh-century Arab invasion of Iran as a "colonial" enterprise, ʿEshqi dedicated his writings to a) highlighting the brutality of that invasion, and b) restoring the voices of its forgotten victims in Iran.[224] The "bloody incident" that he talks about in his works, recast the Arabs in modern nationalist narrative as the ruthless destroyers of Iran's ancient glory.

Unlike medieval poets such as Khāqāni, in ʿEshqi's works, the ruins of Ctesiphon tend to play a role similar to what the desert of Karbala plays for the Shiʿi narrative of Imam Hossein's martyrdom. In other words, Ctesiphon became the setting of another decisive battle – this time between the Persians and invading Arab Muslims. This battle provided an ideological stage for demarcating the "good" from the "bad" or Self from the "Other" in modern Persian literature and culture. The tropes ʿEshqi utilized to breathe a new life into the ruins of Ctesiphon continued to circulate in the repertoire of nationalist texts in 1920s and 1930s. From an ideological as well as rhetorical standpoint, Sadeq Hedayat's works

[223] Standing behind ʿEshqi's were Mirzā Fath ʿAli Ākhundzādeh (1812-1878) and Mirzā Āqā Khān Kermāni (1854-1897), two eminent figures whose late nineteenth-century writings had a lasting effect on generations of intellectuals in Iran. Their writings mobilized an unabashedly anti-Arab rhetoric that was rife with racial anthropological assumptions they found in Orientalist works. See the next chapter on Sadeq Hedayat for a discussion of this intertextual continuity.

[224] It was indeed paradoxical that a subaltern's attempt at "colonial" emancipation resulted in the repression of yet another (future) subaltern group.

tend to follow ʿEshqi's groundbreaking compositions, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three.

ʿEshqi and European-Style Opera as Anti-Colonial Vehicle

ʿEshqi visited the ruins of Ctesiphon in 1916 on his way to Istanbul while fleeing an impending Russian occupation.[225] In a recollection published some three years later, he described the ruins as the moving indication of Iran's ancient glory. To the young ʿEshqi, the greatness of the ruins was enough to excite "[a]ny dispassionate individual (*bashar-e kond-ehsāsi*) [to be] lost for years in wonder and amazement if he sees these [ruins] for an hour."[226] In order to visualize the fantastic quality of the ruins, ʿEshqi borrowed a metaphor from the apparatus of cinema. As he explained:

> After visiting that world of ruins, I saw [in my mind's eye] a movie screen (*pardeh-ye sinamāʾi*) of the grandeur of Iran's past and this country's robust civilization. As a poet, I could hear [in my mind] the cry of king Anūshiravān and other world-conquering Sasanian kings; and the wailing of Shirin and the moaning of Khosrow-dokht. I still can hear those woeful cries in my secret-gaging mind (*demāgh-e asrār-sanjam*).[227]

[225] For information on ʿEshqi see *Namāyesh-nāmeh-hā-ye Mirzādeh ʿEshqi* (Mirzādeh ʿEshqi's Plays) by Mir-Ansāri; *ʿEshqi: Simā-ye Najīb-e Yeh Ānārshit* (ʿEshqi: Portrait of a Noble Anarchist) by Qāʾed; *Mirzādeh ʿEshqi* by Narāqi; and *Mirzādeh ʿEshqi* by Yazdāni. See also *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "ʿEshqi" (Karimi-Hakkak).

[226] Kūhestāni-nezhād, *Gozideh-ye Asnād-e Namāyesh* (A Selection of Theatre Documents), vol. 2, 63.

[227] Kūhestāni-nezhād, *Gozideh-ye Asnād-e Namāyesh* (A Selection of Theatre Documents), vol. 2, 63.

These visionary experiences were embellished into the spectacles of his highly successful operetta *Rastākhiz-e Salātin-e Iran* (Resurrection of Iranian Kings, 1921; henceforth *Resurrection*). Moved by the Turkish operas he had seen in Istanbul, and committed to compose the first example of them in Persian, ʿEshqi drew on the foregoing experiences to write the first "fully musical play" (*namāyesh-e tamām āhangi*) or operetta in Persian. The "mental revolution" (*enqelāb-e zehni*) that had dawned on him after visiting the ruins of Ctesiphon helped him fulfil the task of composing *Rastākhiz* in exile in Istanbul. In an introductory note to his operetta he sentimentally described his piece as "the teardrops I had shed on the paper in mourning the ruins of my unfortunate ancestors."[228]

Resurrection was made to invoke splendid illusions. From the beginning up to the end, the operetta boasted of a production that was packed with spectacular scenery and novel stage effects. As we learn from recently published documents, ʿEshqi spent considerable amounts of money to make his productions as spectacular as possible. At the heart of the operetta's scenic ensemble was a detailed panorama (*pardeh*), reproducing what the poet had observed at Ctesiphon. This is how he described the panorama:

> The curtain rises and discloses the magnificent ruins of the Great Hall of one of the Royal Palaces of the Sasanian Emperors at Madāʾen [Ctesiphon]. It shows a few graves on the floor; a few pillars, some undamaged, some half destroyed; and statues of deities. Overall, the view of the panorama seems very mystery-evoking (*asrār-angiz*).[229]

[228] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 231.

[229] The translation is based on Taraporewala, *Rastākhiz* (Resurrection), 2.

Walking in front of the panorama, ʿEshqi (in cameo appearance) could not believe what he sees. In what may be described as a stage direction, we read: "Mirzādeh ʿEshqi enters, looks at the panorama with utter amazement and is unhappy and sighing!"[230] The trope of wonder tends to frame the operetta, submerging everybody in a deep wonder. ʿEshqi's wonder gives way to a deep stupor, which sets the stage for the phantasmagoria of the ancient kings of Iran coming back to life. The blurring of the boundary between reality and fantasy is poetically signaled in the operetta by an interesting cue:

> ʿEshqi saw the dejected panorama of ancient kings;
> whatever that was in that panorama pours out of it.
>
> *pardeh-ye mātam-e shāhān-e salaf ʿEshqi dīd*
> *kāncheh dar pardeh bod, az pardeh borūn mirizad*.[231]

The first character emerging out of the poet's fantasy is Khosrow-dokht, the daughter of an unidentified Sasanian king. It is through this female character that the poet unleashes some of his harshest social criticisms. Lamenting that in her time "Iran used to be a paradise" (*ferdows-e barin būd*), Khosrow-dokht complains how the golden age of Iran had diminished. The refrain giving cohesion to her soliloquy is: "This ruined graveyard is not our Iran" (*in kharābeh qabrestān na Iran-e māst*).[232]

After Khosrow-dokht, there appeared a gallery of ancient kings of Iran coming back to life one by one. Certain stage effects grandly introduced the entrance of individual kings. This was, for example, how Cyrus was introduced on the stage: "a wall suddenly collapses and recedes from the view. Cyrus, looking magnificent and spectacular as befits great

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[230] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 233.
[231] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 234.
[232] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 224.

kings, makes his entry."[233] In their soliloquys, the resurrected kings strive to awaken the Iranians from a "slumber" and to rekindle in their hearts a love for their country so that they can reach the glory and progress of European nations. Cyrus the Great, Khosrow I (known as Anūshiravān the Just) and Khosrow II Parviz were some of the kings marching on the stage.

Of all the above personalities, the sumptuously costumed Khosrow Parviz is most critical of the decrepitude that has befallen his country. In a doleful poetic passage, he accuses the Iranians of complacency and neglect: "have you forgotten to take care of this country?" (*magar del az negahdāri-ye in mamlekat kandeh-id?*).[234] Once the ancient kings are done with their soliloquys, they join hands to pray for Zoroaster's intervention so that he may save Iran from its predicaments. Their wish is soon granted and the Spirit of Zoroaster makes its appearance on the stage. The entry of the Spirit of Zoroaster is announced with the grandest stage effect we have seen so far. This is how the stage directions describe it: "a wall slowly recedes which reveals a passageway. At the top of the arch of this passageway is a statute of a deity."[235] It was curiously from this *subterranean* vault (seemingly representing the heart of Ctesiphon) that the Zoroastrian prophet makes his grand entrance. Donning a white mantle and long silver-grey hair, Zoroaster appears on the stage "with a heavenly face and prophet-like manners."[236]

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[233] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 235.

[234] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 236.

[235] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 239.

[236] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 239. For the development of figural representations of Zoroaster see Sheffield, "The Prophet

Moving "slowly like a ghost," he delivers an impressive monologue that resonates with topics relating to contemporary politics.

In his strongly worded soliloquy, the prophet invoked certain political challenges facing Iran during the time ʿEshqi composed his operetta. First, he blamed the "Orientals" (*mashreq-zamini*) for incognizance of how the West had been scheming to "devour" their lands. Purporting that once upon a time, Westerners used to graze in jungles like "animals" (*jānevar*), the Zoroastrian prophet exhorted Iranians to take action against the uncivilized West and what it had done to them: "Rise, Orientals, and turn the West's days black!" (*khīz ei mashreq-zamini, rūz-e maghreb kon siyāh*).[237] The main problem was Iran's abandoning its ancient heritage. "Everything I had to say in advice and guidance I have already said," the Spirit of Zoroaster complained, "but Iranians failed to listen to it so they are afflicted like this today" (*ān che bāyad dād, pand va rahbari dādam be khalq* / [...] *in nadād* / *gūsh, Irani beh in badbakhti-ye emrūz oftād*).[238] The advice and guidance the Prophet had given involved the core precepts of his religion: good deeds, good words, and good thoughts (*kār-e nīk va guft-e nīkū va del-e pāk*). Thus, the solution entailed Iran's returning to its ancestral religion – Zoroastrianism.[239]

The Zoroastrian prophet saw hope for Iran. Predicting that a better future was in store for the country, he signaled for "a cradle decorated with a flag of Iran and a few colorful

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Disenchanted: The Zoroastrian Encounter with Modernity and Colonialism" (unpublished dissertation chapter).

[237] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 240.

[238] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 241.

[239] These words tend to be based on what we find in the final pages of the *Dasātīr* where the causes of the Arab Muslim invasion of Iran are discussed. See Keyvān, *Dasātīr*, 215-16.

lamps" to descend from the heaves.[240] Symbolizing the young Iranian nation, the cradle contained the seeds of coming generations of Iranians who would make their country glorious again. This new generation, Zoroaster promised, would rid Iran from any problem it ever had: "From now on we should not pity Iran's fate / there is no blemish on the destiny of Cyrus' country" (*baʿd az in eqbāl-e Iran rā degar afsūs nist* / *lakkeh-i dar sarnevesht-e keshvar-e Sirūs nist*).[241] By reentering the vault, the Spirit of Zoroaster left the stage. A final stage effect marked his exit as "the wall [that had collapsed before his entry was] restored to its original state."[242] The operetta ends with ʿEshqi waking up (with a shudder) and uttering these final words: "[Oh God] grant the fulfilment of the promise of Zoroaster / ʿEshqi saw this dream, you help fulfilling it" (*vaʿdeh-ye Zartosht rā taqdir kon* / *dīd ʿEshqi khāb u to taʿbir kon*).[243]

The panorama or central painted scenery of his operetta meant a lot to ʿEshqi. "It's not an overstatement," he once wrote, "to say that *Resurrection*'s panorama is comparable to [the panoramas of] best European operas."[244] The eminent painter, Kamāl ul-Molk (1848-1940), reportedly put his students at Dār ul-Fonūn (Iran's first polytechnic university) in charge of creating the scenery and props for ʿEshqi's operetta. In order to make sure that

[240] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 240.

[241] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 241.

[242] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 241.

[243] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 241. The translation is based on Taraporewala, *Rastākhiz* (Resurrection), 2.

[244] Kūhestāni-nezhād, *Gozideh-ye Asnād-e Namāyesh* (A Selection of Theatre Documents) vol. 1 (Part 2), 63.

they were realistic enough, Kamāl ul-Molk offered to share with them a drawing he had made from the ruins of Ctesiphon.[245]

The impression these performances made on the audiences was remarkably positive. Based on recently published documents, several eyewitness accounts described productions of ʿEshqi's operetta. For example, the historical lessons one spectator learned from *Resurrection* led him to describe watching ʿEshqi's operetta as the best instruction young Iranians could get about their country's ancient history.[246] ʿEshqi's operetta was lauded by another viewer as "one of the exceptional performances of the Orient" which could inspire people to worship Iran.[247] ʿEshqi's work was additionally praised for attempting to refurbish Iran's tarnished image internationally. As one spectator observed, *Resurrection* could help Iranians take pride in their ethnicity when they visited foreign countries.[248]

The Arab "Other" Makes His Entry

It was within this aura of splendor and ostentation that the Arabs were introduced in modern Persian European-style theatre as the destroyers of Iran's ancient civilization. In the new narrative that emerges from the repertoire of nationalist texts, the Arabs are cast

[245] Sāneʾi, *Tārikh-e Tarrāhi-ye Sahneh* (History of Stage Design [in Iran]), 58.

[246] Mir-Ansāri's *Namāyesh-nāmeh-hā-ye Mirzādeh ʿEshqi* (Mirzādeh ʿEshqi's Plays), 153.

[247] Kūhestāni-nezhād, *Gozideh-ye Asnād-e Namāyesh* (A Selection of Theatre Documents), vol. 1 (Part 2), 75.

[248] Kūhestāni-nezhād, *Gozideh-ye Asnād-e Namāyesh* (A Selection of Theatre Documents), vol. 1 (Part 2), 76.

as uncouth "barbarians" whose animosity toward Iran's pre-Islamic glories brought the latter to a tragic end. To Mirzādeh ʿEshqi, Iran's "nuptial chamber" (the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon) was destroyed by Arab "hatred" (*hejleh-ye mehr-e to virāneh-ye kīn būd?*).[249] A paradigmatic example of this narrative may be found in another remarkable work by Mirzādeh ʿEshqi: *Kafan-e Siyāh* (The Black Shroud, 1916; henceforth *Black Shroud*).

Since there is no evidence that *Black Shroud* was ever staged in Iran (compared with scores of reports that describe the various productions of *Resurrection*), I suggest considering it a closet drama; that is, a play intended to be read and not staged. Internal evidence tends to confirm this as well since stage directions are almost nonexistent in this text; its monologues are overlong; and its setting is described in a detailed poetic exposition. The idea that *The Black Shroud* is a "play" (*namāyesh-nāmeh*) tends to derive from ʿEshqi's first editor's categorizing it so in his (now canonical) edition of the poet's works.[250] Examining ʿEshqi's *The Black Shroud* vis-à-vis the closet dramas that were popular among nineteenth-century British and French romantics can also provide useful information about a desire for historical narratives clashing with non-existent potentials for their commercial production.

This closet drama constitutes an important moment in my study, as it appears to provide one of the earliest representations of Arabs in modern Persian dramatic literature as the enemies of Iran's pre-Islamic civilization. As we shall see, works like *The Black*

[249] See ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 208.

[250] See ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 201.

Shroud soon became reservoirs of ideological and rhetorical capital enabling a younger generation of writers such as Sadeq Hedayat (discussed in detail in the next chapter) to create some of the most unabashedly anti-Arab works in modern Persian literature. I will use ʿEshqi's *The Black Shroud* as a preamble to my study of Sadeq Hedayat as it contains vital information about an epistemological shift we witness in certain works of modern Persianate literature when conceptualizations of a religious "other" start turning into prejudice against an ethnic "other" called Arab. This was when religious bigotry gradually gave way to ethnocentric chauvinism in modern Iran.

It appears that ʿEshqi wrote *The Black Shroud* after he composed *Resurrection*. In his introductory note to the former work, he described it as "a few *more* teardrops" (emphasis added) his visit to the ruins of Ctesiphon brought to his eyes.[251] Cast in dramatic form, *The Black Shroud* recounts the experiences of an unnamed traveler who visits the ruins of Ctesiphon. In a series of scenes and spectacles we follow the traveler as he wanders from one desolate location to another (from a graveyard to a ruined castle) until he reaches a "mysterious mausoleum" (*buqeʿh-ye asrār-angīz*). Similar to *Resurrection*, the narrative here shuttles back and forth between reality and fantasy. In one of its dream sequences at the Ctesiphon ruins, for example, the traveler meets Khosrow-dokht, a Sasanian princess. As it turns out, this crestfallen princess is in fact the Spirit of Iran. She reveals to the traveler her miseries under the "black shroud" (*kafan-e siyāh*) which she had to don for

[251] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 201. ʿEshqi also described *Resurrection* as the "the teardrops I have shed on paper in mourning the ruins of my unfortunate ancestors." See ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 231.

the past eleven centuries or so. ʿEshqi's text implies that this "black shroud" is the Islamic *hijab* women had to don in Islamic Iran. Islamic *hijab* as an analogue for *death*, in other words, is paramount in this reference.

After listening to her words of woe, the traveler cannot face her pain and thus rans away to survive the burden of her revelations. The narrative then flashes forward to a time when the traveler has got back to Iran. In his country, he finds the Sasanian princess or the Spirit of Iran in every woman he meets on the street. *The Black Shroud* ends with a call for communal action against the Islamic *hijab*, which is said to be the cause of "much destruction" (*basi kharābi ze hejāb ast*).[252] According to ʿEshqi, rejecting *hijab* can ostensibly reinstate the dignity (*sarafrāzi*) Iranian women once possessed.

The nearly identical design and content of *Resurrection* and *The Black Shroud* tend to speak of an assumed parallelism between European colonialism and Arab invasion of Iran. Examining this parallelism in detail can shed light on the affinities certain modern Persian writers perceived between Iran's colonial encounters with European nations such as Britain and their own culture's encounter with its Islamic heritage, which they cast as an internal "other." As I shall explain in detail in the next chapter, presumed parallelisms such as these came to a grotesque culmination in Sadeq Hedayat's satirical works. His *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon, posthumously published in 1979; henceforth *The Pearl Canon*) and *al-Beʿsat ul-Islāmiyyah fi Belād al-Afranjiyyah* (A Muslim Delegation in the European Lands, posthumously published in 1985; henceforth *A Muslim Delegation*) are

[252] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 218.

based on an identification of seventh-century Islamic conquests as colonial enterprises, driven by a desire to loot and destroy – that is, completely nonspiritual motives.

As we saw earlier, the spirit of Zoroaster in *Resurrection* blamed Europe's colonial machinations as the reason behind the decline of modern Iran. He also criticized Iranians for indifference toward the perils that surrounded their country: "Look at this insolence that in the West there is this clamor and uproar / one says Iran is mine, another claims, it belongs to us" (*Khiregi bengar ke dar maghreb-zamin ghowghā bepāst / in hami gūyad ke Iran az man, ān guyad ze māst*).[253] A similar stance is articulated by the Spirit of Iran in *The Black Shroud* who blames the Iranian women's entrapment in Islamic *hijab* as the reason behind her country's present-day ruined state. The presumed parallelism between Islamicization of Iran and its acquiring a backward status is articulated unambiguously in *The Black Shroud* when the Spirit of Iran says, "I'm in a ruin since Iran is in ruins" (*man beh viráneh ze virān shodan-e Irānam*).[254]

In what may be described as ʿEshqi's anti-Islamic rhetoric, *hijab* metonymically stands for the entirety of the Islamic faith. So, the princess' putting on *hijab* is equated with Iran's conversion to Islam. The assumed backwardness of modern Iran is then said to be because of the enforcement of Islamic *hijab*, which in ʿEshqi's text represents the hegemony of Islamic culture in Iran. The anti-Islamic implications of this metonymy points to the detrimental impact Islam was perceived to have on the Persian culture. One result of this conflation was the reduction of Iran's Islamic heritage to "sorcery" (*telesm*)

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[253] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 239. Translation is by Irani, *Poets of the Pahlavi Regime*, 479.

[254] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 215.

and "superstition" (*khorāfāt*) in ʿEshqi's works. This rhetoric may be considered as an early example of an anti-colonial discourse mobilized against Islam in modern Persian literature.

The crucial meeting between the traveler and the Sasanian princess at the ruins of Ctesiphon was mediated by an elaborate narrative that comes to a culmination at those ruins. It is here and among these ruins that we can arguably discover the *armature* of the discourse the Arab "other" was subjected to in certain texts of modern Persian literature.[255] The moment I am specifying here involves the traveler's coming across the footprints of a barefooted Arab in the ruins of Ctesiphon. The contrast ʿEshqi posits here between the two – i.e. between the opulent material culture of pre-Islamic Iran and that of uncouth Arab invaders – functions as the armature of the anti-Arab discourse we find in many modern texts such as Sadeq Hedayat's. Deploying this contrast to arrive at conclusions regarding Iran's superior civilizational status (because of its more advanced material culture) became the order of the day when nationalism became rampant in Iran in 1920s and 1930s.

In the beginning pages of *The Black Shroud*, a stream of moonlight invites the traveler to ponder the magnificence of the ruins at Ctesiphon. Frustrated by the destruction of the Sasanian monument, and recollections of its pre-Islamic grandeur, the traveler is reminded of a "bloody incident" that ended that grandeur:

> I remembered a bloody incident, of which my heart bled,
> as though that Arab war had just happened inside me!

[255] For my study of the "armature" of this discourse, I rely on Pastor Bodmer's *The Armature of Conquest: Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589.*

Yād shod vaqeʿh-ye khūnini, vaz ān del khūn shod
gūʾī ān jang-e ʿArab dar del-e man aknūn shod!).[256]

The recollection is so emotionally unsettling that it initiates a cycle of loss and trauma in the narrative, sending the traveler back in time (mentally) to Iran's ancient past. Bringing to mind ʿEshqi's description of the ruins, a metaphor borrowed from the apparatus of cinema gave life to the traveler's stream of recollections here. The "cinema of the past history [of Iran]" (*sinamāʾi az tārikh-e guzashteh*) that unfolded in front of his eyes projected his fantasies about Iran's pre-Islamic grandeur onto the ancient monument. The ruins, in other words, were metaphorically turned into a "screen" (*pardeh*) from which a phantasmagoria of ancient kings receded: "Whatever that was hidden was coming to life / I saw a screen of the past [events]" (*āncheh dar pardeh bod az pardeh bedar mididam* / *pardehʾi kaz salaf āyad be nazar mi-didam*).[257] The play on the multiple meanings of *dar pardeh* in Persian ("hidden" and "on the screen") let ʿEshqi use his panorama to creatively set the stage for the dream sequence in which images of *not seen before* (hidden) kings appear *on the stage*.

From a technical standpoint, what ʿEshqi does here is reminiscent of what we find in Persian indigenous tradition of *pardeh-khāni* (lit. "reading screens") or picture narration

[256] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 204.

[257] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 204. A reiteration of this line may also be found in the *Resurrection* when the dream sequence was about to start. See ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 234.

and especially in its religious variety, *shamāyel-gardāni* (lit. "showing portraits [of religious figures]") or painting recitation.[258] Jāber Anāsori has defined *pardeh-khāni* as,

> the art of breaking the silence of mute scenes. The art of breathing life into pictures and giving movement to silent figures that are painted on screens. It is the art of pictures starting to talk.[259]

In a similar manner, certain details of the panorama came to life to give shape to the plot of *The Black Shroud*. ʿEshqi's "breaking the silence" of painted representations (panorama) of the pre-Islamic past shared certain affinities with the art of a *shamāyel-gardān* (painting narrator) whose job was to breathe life into historical paintings depicting the key events of the Shiʿi narrative of Karbala.

Although ʿEshqi (or his editor) called these moving images a "cinema" yet it would be more accurate to consider them a *tableau vivant*. According to Peter Brooks' discussion of nineteenth century melodrama, a *tableau* was created "where speech [was] silenced and narrative arrested in order to offer a fixed and visual representation."[260] The highly stylized images that march in front of the traveler's eyes depict the ancient past in an immobilized posture, saturated in an aura of splendor and military might. In these *tableaux*, Iran's ancient kings were depicted in a variety of royal postures in magnificent courts or in the presence of victorious armies. The static imagery we find here shares

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[258] Scholarship on these topics is still in its early stages. For the *pardeh-khāni* tradition in Iran see Chelkowski, "Narrative Painting and Painting Recitation in Qajar Iran" and Yamamoto, "Naqqāli: Professional Iranian Storytelling." For a recent discussion, see Ingvild Flaskerud, *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism*.

[259] Anāsori, *Darāmadi bar Namāyesh va Niyāyesh dar Iran* (An Introduction on Drama and Devotion in Iran), 173.

[260] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 61.

certain affinities with what Edward Said has argued about European Orientalists' "vision of Orient as spectacle, or *tableau vivant*."[261] It may be argued that ʿEshqi's work had certain effect on the popular representations of the ancient past in a series of static spectacles (called "cinema") in 1920s and 1930s.[262]

One constant in the idealistic representations we find in *The Black Shroud* is that under the pre-Islamic kings, the four corners of Iran were filled with happiness.[263] However, all of a sudden the spectacular composition of ʿEshqi's *tableau vivant* was disrupted by the appearance of the Arab Caliph ʿOmar who wrested sovereignty from a crestfallen Yazdgerd. To the traveler, the aftermath of this takeover was utter devastation for Iran: "There's no news about Kasrā [Persian king], nor the arch [of Ctesiphon] / and that ruin [is] still in a ruined state" (*Nah ze kasrā khabari, ni tāqi / vān kharābeh bekharābi bāqi*).[264] Pondering the disorder that apparently befell Iran after its Arab conquest nearly drove the traveler out of his mind, forcing him to wander away in a graveyard. Some "sentimental" and some "mystical" meditations on the transience of this world and especially the bygone glories of ancient Iran occupy this section. It is with these thoughts that the traveler stepped into a "ruined castle" (*qaleʿh-ye makh-rūbeh*) which represented the ruins of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon.

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[261] For the static representations of the "Orient" in Western Orientalist discourse see Said, *Orientalism*, especially 158.

[262] For example, in a talk delivered in 1926, the well-known scholar of Zoroastrianism, Ebrāhim Purdāvūd, represented the "major events" of the history of Iran as snapshots (*ʿaks*) moving on a "movie screen" (*pardeh-ye sinamāʾi*). See Pūrdāvūd, *Khorramshāh*, 82.

[263] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 204.

[264] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 205.

The cycle of loss and trauma that had started earlier in the text ends in this section. Arriving at the ruined castle, the traveler pauses again to admire the magnificence of the ancient monument. Pitying its present state of decay, he contemplates "it is clear that history is doleful there" (*zin ayān ast ke tārikh dar ān ghamnāk ast*).[265] To him, this history was inscribed on everything he could find there. A standing pillar, for example, was seen as a "flag of blood" (*beiraq-e khūn*) on which "history of [past] centuries" was written.

The prosperity the traveler finds in that history is symbolized by the wealth he finds in the cushions of Khosrow II Parviz and the crown of Jam. To him, this material abundance was in contradistinction to the poverty he identified in the Arabs, reflected by the bare footprints he identified at the ruins of Ctesiphon. In a quatrain redolent of certain brand of skepticism we find in classical Persian literature, the traveler describes this contrast as follows:

> I saw the footprints of a barefooted Arab;
> I considered the relation of a king's crown to an Arab's foot!
> I learned whatever I had to learn about this world!
> Anything else I saw afterwards made me laugh at the heavens!
>
> *Jā-ye pā-ye ʿArab-e berahneh-pāʾi didam*
> *Nesbat-e tāj-e shah u pā-ye ʿArab sanjidam!*
> *Āncheh bāyast befahmam ze jahān fahmidam!*
> *Baʿd az ān har cheh keh didam ze falak khandidam!*[266]

The interjection of the Arabs into the ruins of Ctesiphon can be considered as an important move in the process of poetic modernity Persian literature underwent in the

[265] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 210.

[266] ʿEshqi, *Kolliyāt-e Mosavvar-e ʿEshqi* (Anthology of ʿEshqi with Pictures), ed. Moshir-Salimi, 211.

early decades of the twentieth century.[267] Pitting the uncouth Arabs against the splendor of pre-Islamic Iran turned the former into the "other" of the Persians. In classical Persian literature, the ruins of Ctesiphon were always a favorite locus for reflecting on the mutability of this world. The contrast different observers perceived between Ctesiphon's present decline and the magnificence it once possessed inspired them to use those ruins as a trope for the impermanence of human achievements and the inevitable death that awaits us in this world. Some quatrains attributed to the twelfth-century poet and mathematician, Omar Khayyam, perfectly capture this theme of transience. As I shall argue in my discussions of Sadeq Hedayat (Chapter Three) and Manekji Limji Hataria (Chapter Four), emergence of archaism in modern Persian literature tends to coincide with the antiquarianism ʿEshqi entertained in his works.

In the hands of writers such as ʿEshqi, the historical agency of Arab Muslims was restored as "invaders" who destroyed pre-Islamic sites such as Ctesiphon and Persepolis. As I shall explain in the next section, in medieval Persian literature, Iran's pre-Islamic ruins are symbols of mutability of this world, since even legendary kings (such as Jamshid and Bahrām) could not stop the ravages of time or the workings of fate. Studying the rising fortunes of Ctesiphon can let us see how an emergent notion of territoriality expressed itself in terms of "land" or "soil" (*khāk*) in certain premodern texts. The increasing importance of Ctesiphon as a magnificent, unsurpassable pre-Islamic accomplishment can help us examine the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was through this antiquarianism and the archaic

[267] For a history of modernity in Persian literature, see Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry*.

discourse it inspired that the pre-Islamic heritage of Iran came back to life, forming the backbone of the ideology modern Persian nationalism propagated in Iran in 1920s and 1930s.

Ctesiphon Rising as Unsurpassed

The archaic discourse that frames the ruins at Ctesiphon uses them as a trope for the ravages of time and the frailty of human endeavor. It was in the modern age and under the aegis of modern nationalist ideology that the detritus of the Sasanian palace was divorced from that discourse and re-imagined within an antiquarian discourse that recognized locations like Ctesiphon as a "monument" of Iran's pre-Islamic grandeur. It may be argued that this antiquarian discourse aspired to supplant Iran's Islamic heritage by re-contextualizing ancient ruins as remnants of Iran's pre-Islamic grandeur – and not relics of an empire suppressed by Islam.[268] In their new incarnation, these ruins were recast in Persianate spaces as signifiers of a "superior" civilization that was tragically destroyed by the onslaught of "inferior" Arabs.

There exists a strain in Persian writing that uses the ruins of pre-Islamic palaces (such as Ctesiphon and Persepolis) as symbols of the inevitability of death in this world. An early example of this topos may be found in the quatrains that are commonly attributed

[268] My arguments in this section are inspired by Sarah Bowen Savant, a scholar of early Islamic historiography. Her "Forgetting Ctesiphon: Iran's Pre-Islamic Past, c. 800-1100" and *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (2013) offer a useful approach for discussing the emergence of antiquarianism in the Persianate spaces I investigate in this dissertation.

to the celebrated mathematician and poet, ʿOmar Khayyam (1048-1131). In a much-quoted quatrain, for example, Khayyam appears to refer to the ruins at Ctesiphon to question the integrity of human accomplishments as they are inevitably consumed by death:

> That palace where Bahrām took the cup in hand
> The antelope has made its couching-place and the lion its earth;
> Bahram who hunted the wild ass all his life,
> See how the grave has hunted him down?
>
> *Ān qasr ke Bahrām darū jām gereft,*
> *Āhū bacheh kard u shīr ārām gereft.*
> *Bahrām ke gūr migerefti hameh ʿomr,*
> *Didi ke chegūneh gūr Bahrām gereft?*[269]

The reversal of fortune, poetically conveyed by the play on the two meanings of *gūr* in Persian ("onager" and "grave"), was meant to indicate how seamlessly death might overtake the greatest human accomplishments. To Khayyam, even the palace of the mighty Sasanian prince Bahrām V (r. 420-438) could not escape the forces of decay. Like the exquisite pot, the edifice at Ctesiphon represents the ultimate human accomplishment in this world. However, faced with the forces of mutable nature, the magnificent palace at Ctesiphon became yet another evidence of the grand narrative of mortality that awaits everything in this world. In another quatrain, Khayyam describes the Sasanian edifice as the "palace which once vied with heaven." Yet, again, it ended up becoming a habitation of wild animals.[270]

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[269] For the Persian quatrain, see Forūghi and Ghani, *Robaʿiyat-e Khayyam*, 52. The translation is a modified version of Peter Avery and Heath-Stubbs, *The Rubaʿiyat of Omar Khayyam*, 55.

[270] For the Persian quatrain, see Forūghi and Ghani, *Robaʿiyat-e Khayyam*, 52. For its English translation, see Peter Avery and Heath-Stubbs, *The Rubaʿiyat of Omar Khayyam*, 55.

In the hands of Khāqāni Shervāni (1121-90), a celebrated composer of *qasideh* (ode), the ruins of the portico at Ctesiphon (*eivān-e Madā'en*) continue to retain their close association with death while at the same time becoming a nostalgic trope for a glory long lost. In his famous *qasideh* about the ruins at Ctesiphon, which is commonly known as "Madā'en *qasideh*," Khāqāni eloquently celebrates the grandeur of pre-Islamic Iran, portraying its kings as wise and just. However, the praise he confers on pre-Islamic Iran is piously balanced by his allegorizing its downfall as will of God. As I shall explain in the coming pages, nationalistic re-readings of Khāqāni's poem recast the medieval poet's moralistic overtones in favor of a retrospective contemplation that is consumed with regret for Iran's lost pre-Islamic glory. As a 1924 literary competition of "adaptations and augmentations" of Khāqāni's poem put it, the medieval poet was driven by "love for nationalism" (*'eshq-e melliyat*) when he turned his gaze to the ruins at Ctesiphon in the seventeenth century![271]

Khāqāni's poem starts with an imaginative invitation to the readers to ponder the ruins "with the eye of fancy" (*az dideh-ye fekrat*). This sets the stage for a mnemonic journey back in time to when the Sasanian Empire was at the height of its glory. The series of beautiful *tableaux* Khāqāni presents in his poem captures the spectacular glories of the pre-Islamic Iran. For example, one *tableau* displays the military might of a Sasanian king by showing him trampling his enemy with an elephant. It is interesting to note that

[271] The six poems (*tasdīs*) winning this literary competition were published by Irānshāhr Publications in 1924 in Berlin. See *Eivān-e Madā'en: Tasdīs-e Qasideh-ye Khāqāni* (Portico of Madā'en: Six Poems about Ode by Khāqāni).

the enemy crushed under an elephant here happens to be the last Arab king of al-Hirā, Naʿmān III ibn al-Mandhir who was killed by Khosrow II Parviz in 602 CE.[272]

Another *tableau* describes the magnificence of Sasanian material culture by describing the golden fruits (citron and quince) they used to use to decorate their courts.[273] But, perhaps the most conspicuous element of Sasanian royal splendor described in Khāqāni's poem involves the legendary wealth of the court of Khosrow II Parviz (r. 590-628). As the speaker reminisced, "Parviz would scatter golden herbs at every feast / And make a golden garden on his spread of gold".[274]

To Khāqāni, such extravagant descriptions of pre-Islamic splendor were matched by strong moral admonishment (*ʿebrat*). Contrary to a poet like Khayyam who often blames cruel fate or invincible death for the decline of human accomplishments, Khāqāni

[272] For English translation of al-Buhturi's poem, see Arberry, *Arabic Poetry*, 72-80. In another well-known *qasideh* about Ctesiphon, the Arab poet al-Buhturi (d. 897 CE) evokes Sasanian might by describing the defeat of a Roman Emperor by Khosrow I (r. 531-579). Al-Buhturi's poem is commonly believed to be Khāqāni's model for composing this particular the "Madāʾen *qasideh*."

[273] The golden citron and quince were not only meant to exhibit the material splendor of the Sasanian court. They were also tool for perfuming communal spaces in ancient Iran. On the custom of using hollow golden fruits as containers of camphor and incense, see Āidenlū, "Toranj-e Būyā va Beh-e Zarrīn" (Fragrant bergamot and golden quince).

[274] Clinton, "The Madāʾn Qasida of Xāqāni Sharvāni," 166. The "spread of gold" refers to the jewel-studded Sasanian royal carpet known as "The spring of Khosrow" (*bahār-e kasrā*) or the "winter carpet" (*farsh-e zemestāni*). Based on what we learn from medieval Arab historians, the abundance of jewelry used in this carpet created a virtual spring garden for the Sasanian kings so that they could carouse in it during the winter. The carpet was eventually cut up into pieces and divided among the victorious Arabs when they captured the Sasanian palace in 637 AD. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica* s.v., "Bahār-e Kasrā."

attributes the downfall of ancient Iran to the will of God: "Parviz has vanished now; speak no more of that vanished one / Where are the golden herbs on his spread cloth? Go, recite instead how many [gardens and fountains and sown fields] did they abandon".[275] The quoted phrase ("how many [gardens and fountains and sown fields] did they abandon") alludes to an admonishment we find in the Qurʿan (44:25-27) about how prosperous peoples were made to abandon their worldly accomplishments when they stopped listening to God. The accomplishments mentioned in the Qurʿan includes gardens, sown fields and "noble buildings" (*maqāmen kabīr*) which may be interpreted as *palaces*.[276]

Surpassing "arrogant" kings (Ar. *tāghūt*) and destroying the magnificent edifices they have erected on the face of earth are important themes in the Qurʿan.[277] It may be argued that any edifice that was meant to vie with the heavens has been subjected to divine fury as it portends "arrogance" (Ar. *uluvv*) on the part of their builders. This attribute is specifically preserved for Allah in the Qurʿan and acknowledged in titles such as *ʿali ul-ʿazīm* ("the Sublime, the Tremendous"). Examples of such edifices may be found in the Qasas ("The Stories") chapter of the Qurʿan. Here, we learn that Pharaoh's "lofty tower" (*sarh*) and Korah's house of treasures were brought down since they were built to vie with God's creation. Based on what we learn from this chapter, any attempt at stealing the gaze of the believers from God's creation appears to be a hallmark of damnation for

[275] Clinton, "The Madāʾn Qasida of Xāqāni Sharvāni," 166.

[276] This phrase has been variously translated as "goodly sites" (Pictktall), "noble station" (Arberry) and "stately mansions" (Ahmed ʿAli). The translation I have used above belongs to Yusuf ʿAli.

[277] I would like to thank Abdul-Karim Sorūsh for his wonderful advice (2012-2013) when I was developing this argument in earlier drafts of this chapter.

those who do it. It is interesting to note that an version of this theme may be found in Nizāmi's *Khamseh* (Five Poems, 1180) where the Arab king, Naʿmān, is made to relinquish his "heavenly roof" (*kiyāni bām*) when the future king, Bahrām V, reminds him of the beauty of God's creation. Although Naʿmān is (literally) brought down from his edifice, yet the closure of his narrative tends to depart from the fiercer closures we find in the Qurʿan.[278]

Khāqāni's representing the ruined Sasanian palace as a signifier for divine fury is in line with the Qurʿanic paradigm. Either drawing on the holy book or echoing Shiʿi Imam ʿAli's famous remark,[279] the poet's treatment of the ruins at Ctesiphon reiterate the moral lesson the Qurʿan ostensibly intended to teach. This perhaps explains why Khāqāni's *qasideh* has been described as a "profoundly Islamic work with a clear anti-monarchical and anti-nationalistic coloration."[280] However, the idea that this poem is "anti-monarchical" needs to be reconsidered.

The ambivalence we find in Khāqāni's outlook toward pre-Islamic Iran is reminiscent of the ambivalence the ʿAbbāsid society felt toward the pre-Islamic history of Iran. As it has been argued, the ʿAbbāsid "express[ed] both nostalgia for an idealized past and

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[278] See "Characteristics of Semenār and the Building of the Palace of Khavarnaq" in Nizāmi, *Khamseh* (Quinary), 715-22.

[279] In a story recounted in *Ketāb al-Aghāni* (11:137), Imam ʿAli denounces one of his companions for poetically blaming the "autumn wind" for the destruction of Sasanian grandeur. The companion is instructed instead to recite the Qurʿanic verses Khāqāni invokes in his poem (discussed above). See Mahdavi-Dāmghāni, "Eivān-e Madāʾen az Divān-e Buhturi" (Portico of Ctesiphon from Buhturi's Anthology [of Poems]), 22.

[280] Clinton, "The Madāʾn Qasida of Xāqāni Sharvāni," 156.

satisfaction in its end" when they pondered sites such as the ruined palace at Ctesiphon.[281] This ambivalent attitude additionally included the profound praise Khāqāni conferred on Khosrow I – commonly known as "the Just" (*dādgar* or *ʿādel*) – whom the poet considers an ideal monarch. The Qurʿanic allusion tends to characterize the conquest of Iran as something preordained and the Arab Muslim invaders as "heir" to the Sasanian Empire – since in the context of the Qurʿanic story, the Israelites become "inheritors" to Pharaoh. Thus, the admonition that is partially quoted by Khāqāni is followed in the Qurʿan by a promise: "and We made other people inherit (those things)" (44:28).

From a thematic standpoint, Khāqāni's reiteration of the Qurʿanic narrative connects his poem to certain Arabic historical texts for which the Ctesiphon ruins are an "expressive relic" for an empire suppressed by Islam (*āyāt al-Islam*).[282] In this body of literature the rise of Islam is underpinned by a gradual demise of Ctesiphon as a viable center of political power as Kufa (a garrison city built in its vicinity) gradually replaced it in the years following the conquest of Iran.

However, Khāqāni's subscription to the Qurʿanic narrative is not without its ambivalences. Like any complex poem, certain aspects of his *qasideh* tend to work against that narrative, supplementing it with novel features. These features represent possibilities that can accommodate different readings; readings that tend to militate against the canonical Qur'anic narrative I explained above, and especially the Arabic

[281] Savant, "Forgetting Ctesiphon," 185.

[282] It has been argued that medieval Arab traditionists systematically erased the pre-Islamic history of Ctesiphon in order to represent it as a city *surpassed* by Islam. See Savant, "Forgetting Ctesiphon," 170.

historiographical texts that are inspired by it. To give an example, Khāqāni praises a pre-Islamic Persian king as a just ruler whose justice may be imitated by Muslim sovereigns as well. Anūshiravān is in the poem as the exemplar of justice and wisdom in per-Islamic Iran. The "chain of the court" of Anūshiravān (the very first image we encounter in the speaker's mnemonic journey) is turned into an emblem of the Sasanian king's justice as it connects his crown to a bell outside of the court "so that any person of whatever station could appeal directly to him for redress of injustice."[283]

In a way, everything in "Madāʾen *qasideh*" coheres around the image of Anūshiravān as a paragon of justice. His famous chain metaphorically connects his splendor at the palace to his subjects outside. Khāqāni's emphasis on the virtues of the Sasanian king arguably rehabilitated the image of pre-Islamic kings of Iran as differing from Qurʿanic monarchs; monarchs who are always consumed by such damning traits as "transgression" (*esrāf*) and "arrogance" (*estekbār*) against Allah.[284] Anūshiravān's justice, on the other hand, creates a humane and even spiritual character for him. The spiritual undertones of his character tends to contradict the "worldliness" of pre-Islamic kings of Iran, putting Anūshiravān on a par with Prophet Muhammad who is a paragon of humility and unpretentiousness in this particular regard.[285] Such a nuanced characterization enabled Khāqāni to lift the status of pre-Islamic kings of Iran from the "other" of the Qurʿanic

[283] Clinton, "The Madāʾn Qasida of Xāqāni Sharvāni," 157.

[284] Arrogance (*estekbār*) against Allah is a characteristic of the Devil (*Iblis*) in the Qurʿan. For example, the Devil "demurs through pride" after refusing to prostrate in front of Adam (2:34).

[285] For the "worldliness" of pre-Islamic kings and Prophet Muhammad's humility and unpretentiousness, see *Encyclopedia of Islam* s.v., "Kisrā".

narrative to sovereigns ostensibly sharing characteristics reserved for Prophet Muhammad. Such rehabilitation put the pre-Islamic in proximity of the Islamic, conferring legitimacy to the former, as a valuable repository of knowledge worthy of the attention of all Muslims.

The syncretic quality of Khāqāni's approach is reminiscent of the hybridity we find in the didactic *andarz* (mirror of princess) literature that flourished in post-conquest Iran.[286] In the parameters of this genre, the pre-Islamic wisdom of Persian literature was denuded of its Zoroastrian character so that it may be assimilated into a global Islamic literature that was written in Arabic. In fact, it was from this hybrid literature that poets like Khāqāni distilled the capital of Iran's pre-Islamic literature, learning about the justice of Anūshiravān and the legendary wealth of Khosrow II Parviz.[287]

The other novel aspect of Khāqāni's *qasideh* concerns the tropes he used to describe his work. Toward the end of his poem, Khāqāni uses a series of expressive objects that were meant to embody his *qasideh* in themselves. In one place, for example, he describes his poem as a "drink" (*sharbat*) anybody must have from that "sea of intuition" (*daryā-ye basīrat*), that is, the ruins of Ctesiphon. In another place, he describes his poem as a "souvenir" (*rahāvard*) he would bring back from Ctesiphon for his friends in Shervān. Trying a more sophisticated trope, Khāqāni also likens his poem to "prayer beads" (*tasbīh*)

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[286] For a survey of the rise of this genre of Persian literature in post-conquest Iran, see Davaran, *Continuity in Iranian Identity*. For *andarz* literature as "the grammar of ethical thought" in Persian, see Karimi-Hakkak, "Adab, Akhlāq, Andarz: Taʿammolāti darbāreh-ye Seh Mafhūm dar Farhang-e Iran" (Thoughts on Three Concepts in Persian Culture).

[287] This phenomenon has been called the "Persian presence in the Islamic world." See Ehsan Yarshater's comprehensive chapter in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*.

he made from the clay of Salmān-e Fārsi, or Salman the Persian, who is buried near the ruins.[288] In the line I cite here, Khāqāni reminds himself to take a "souvenir" from the Ctesiphon ruins:

> Everyone carries away prayer beads made of Hamza's clay from Mecca,
> So you take prayer beads made of Salmān's clay from Madāʾen
>
> *Har kas barad az Makkeh subheh ze gel-e Hamzeh*
> *pas to ze Madāʾen bar tasbīh-e gel-e Salmān*.[289]

According to Esteʿlāmi's annotations to this line, "no one [presumably no orthodox Muslim] makes prayer beads from the clay of an *ʿajam* [i.e. a non-Arab]."[290] Therefore, Khāqāni's suggesting that he will not do what other Muslims have done in the past may be interpreted as his endeavoring to initiate a potentially "unorthodox" tendency, highlighting his own non-Arab (outsider) origin. This is because the custom of making prayer beads from the clay of places other than Mecca is believed to be a specifically Shiʿi custom. As it has been observed, the Shiʿis' making prayer beads from the soil of the grave of Imam Hossein in Karbala was meant to parallel the Sunni pilgrims' custom of bringing prayer beads from Mecca.[291] According to Shiʿi tradition, Fatemeh, the daughter

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[288] Salmān became the governor of Ctesiphon and lived there until his death (*c.* 656). His grave has been a popular pilgrimage site for Shiʿis. See *Encyclopedia of Islam* s.v., "Salmān al-Fārisī." See Torki, *Pārsā-ye Pārsi: Salmān-e Fārsi beh Ravāyat-e Motūn-e Fārsi* (The Pious Persian: Salmān the Persian according to Persian Texts) and Mohājerāni, *Barrasi-ye Seir-e Zendegi va Hekmat va Hokūmat-e Salmān-e Fārsi* (Analysis of Life, Wisdom and Governance of Salman the Persian). See also Massignon, *Salmān-e Pāk* (Salman the Pious, trans. ʿAli Shariʿati).

[289] Clinton, "The Madāʾn Qasida of Xāqāni Sharvāni," 167.

[290] Esteʿlāmi, *Naqd va Sharh-e Qasāyed-e Khāqāni* (Criticism and Annotations on the Odes of Khāqāni), 1118.

[291] See *Encyclopedia of Islam* s.v., "Subha".

of Prophet Muhammad, was the first to make prayer beads from Hamza's clay; so her followers continue this custom by making prayer beads from clay taken from Karbala where Imam Hossein was martyred.[292] Therefore, Khāqāni's epitomizing his poem as a hybrid object may be interpreted as his mobilizing a Shiʿi sentiment to rival the customs and rituals of other (Sunni) Muslims.[293]

As it has been observed, the rising star of Ctesiphon in medieval Persian literature appears to be concomitant with the rise of Salmān as the "true" Muslim in early Islamic traditions.[294] Ctesiphon as part Islamic and part Persian, as Khāqāni's hybrid trope implies, arguably foreshadowed the prominent position Iran's ancient ruins came to possess in the antiquarian ideology of modern Persian nationalism in 1920s and 1930s. In an attempt to reclaim their country's past – what they perceived to be purloined by Islamist historiographers – nationalist writers mobilized a complex discourse of "othering" they had inherited from certain Shiʿi texts. As I shall try to explain in the next

[292] See *Dā'erat ul-Moʿāref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi* (The Great Encyclopedia of Islam) s.v., "Tasbīh".

[293] For a discussion of Khāqāni's religion and the possibility of his being a Shiʿi, see Khāqāni, *Divān* (ed. Sajjādi), pp. xxvi-xxx. Certain scholars believe that "a very definite Shi'ite fervor and sense of patriotic passion-play […] surrounds" this poem. See Korangy, *Development of the Ghazal and Khāqāni's Contribution*, 300.

[294] For how Salmān's importance in the history of early Islam was downplayed by early Arab traditionists see Savant, *The New Muslims*, 61-89. For his rise to prominence when Muslim traditionists of Persian descent took interest in him in the ninth century CE, see pages 69-88 of this book.

chapter, Hedayat's making recourse to this antiquarian discourse of "othering" was crucial for his constructing the anti-Arab rhetoric and imagery we find in his works.[295]

Afterlife of Ctesiphon Ruins in Persianate Texts

In the years to come, echoes of Khāqāni's ambivalent outlook toward the ancient heritage of Iran continued to resonate in the works of historians, travelers and antiquarians. Ctesiphon in these texts continues to retain its aura as a relic of a glorious pre-Islamic accomplishment. These texts may be considered as links between an emergent notion of territoriality and "soil" (*khāk*) we found in Khāqāni, and the antiquarian endeavors that became popular in Iran in 1920s and 1930s.

An early reference to the ruins of Ctesiphon may be found in *Tārikh-e Oljāito* (History of Oljāito), a fourteenth century work of history. The section I want to cite here recounts a visit the Il-Khānid emperor, Öljeitü (r. 1304-16), payed to ruins in 1309 CE. Captivated by the spectacle of the magnificence ruins, the emperor prostrates for three times in front of the arch of the palace. After doing so, he is quoted as saying, "for a thousand years many great people and holy men have contemplated this matchless arch. I am prostrating in front of those contemplations."[296]

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[295] A range of "other" figures may be discovered in Hedayat's works. For the image of Jews in his works, see Pīrnazar, "Chehreh-ye Yahūd dar Āsār-e Seh Nevisandeh-ye Motejadded-e Irani." In this dissertation, I only focus on the genealogy of the representation of Arabs in modern Persian literature with a focus on Sadeq Hedayat's works.

[296] Al-Qāshāni, *Tārikh-e Oljāito* (History of Oljāito), 87-8. For further references to Ctesiphon in medieval Persian literature, see Torki, *Pārsā-ye Pārsi*, 117-19.

As it may be guessed, over time, the erection of the Sasanian palace has been wrapped in supernatural aura. The elaborate account of the Sasanian palace we find in Hamd-Allah Mostowfi's *Nozhat ul-Qolūb* (c. 1340) is an example of this. According to this medieval historian and geographer, the erection of the palace can be attributed to the Persian mythic king, Tahmūres, who is also known as "demon-binder" for his supernatural powers.[297] Like Khāqāni, Mostowfi's celebration of the edifice's pre-Islamic legacy is balanced by an account concerning how its arch cracked when Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 571 CE. To this writer, the arch is still standing so that it serve as a token of Prophet Muhammad's miraculous victory over kings who could erect such great structures.[298]

The legacy of Khāqāni's *qasideh* was preserved in certain travelogues that were written by Muslim pilgrims of the Persianate world.[299] These pilgrims used the towering arch of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon as a handy landmark to locate the burial place of Salmān the Persian. Reiterating Khāqāni's ambivalent outlook toward the pre-Islamic past, these pilgrims usually acknowledge the pre-Islamic grandeur of the ruins while at the same time piously celebrate Islam's ultimate victory over it. It is interesting to note that it was only when they were done with their visit to the holy grave that they turned their attention to the pre-Islamic ruins for historical contemplation.

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[297] Mostowfi, *Nozhat ul-Qolūb* (Excursion of Hearts), ed. Dabir-Siyāqi, 46-7.

[298] Mostowfi, *Nozhat ul-Qolūb* (Excursion of Hearts), ed. Dabir-Siyāqi, 48.

[299] For hajj travelogues see Daniel, "The Hajj and Qajar Travel Literature" and Jaʿfariān, *Panjāh Safarnāmeh-ye Hajj-e Qajari* (Fifty Qajar Hajj Travelogues, 8 volumes).

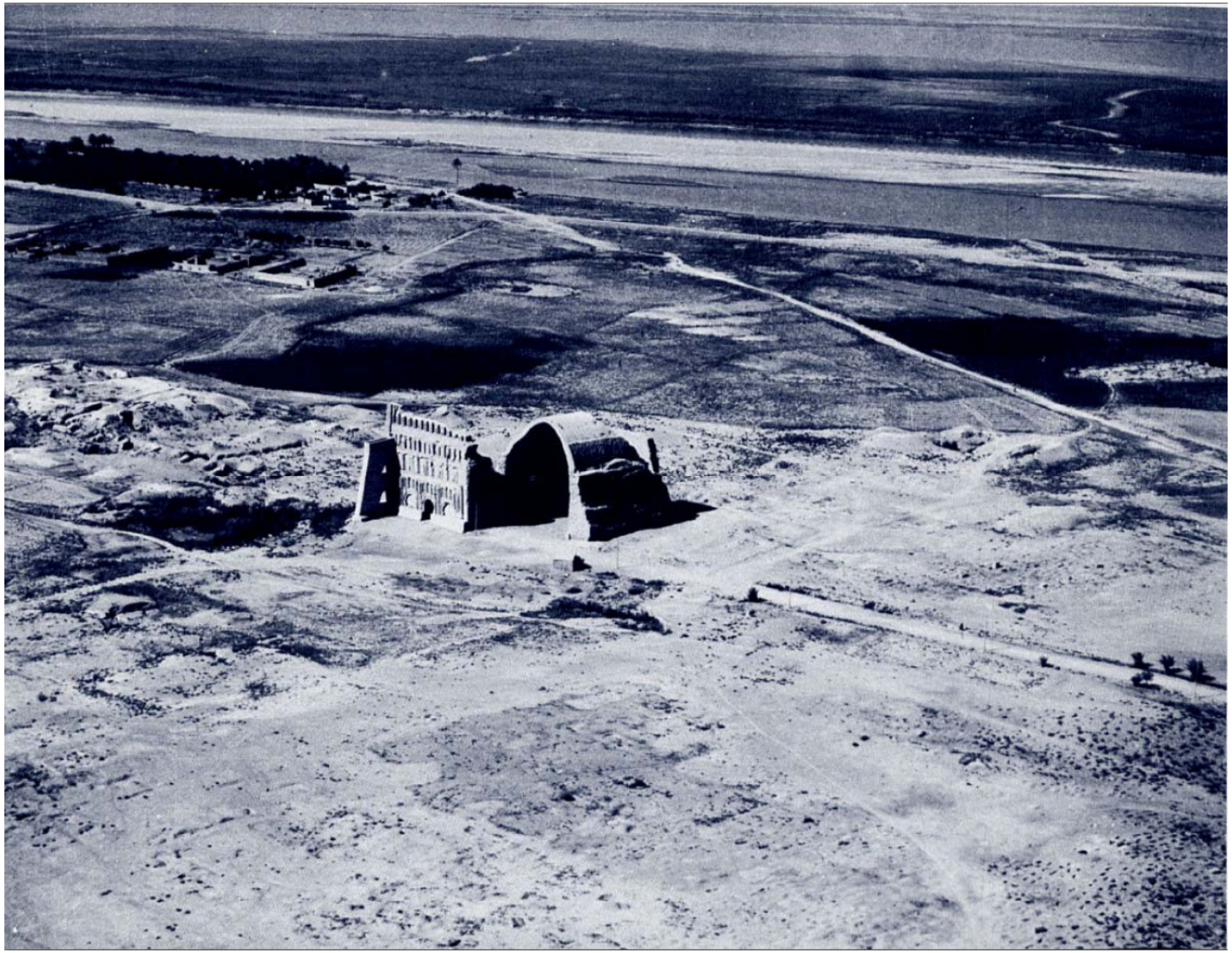
A good example of this outlook may be found in a travel account written by a Muslim Indian prince named Hafez Mohammad Abdul Hossein whose travelogue is considered the oldest hajj travelogue of the Qajar era.[300] In many ways, Abdul Hossein's *Tazkerat ul-Tarīq* (1817) may be considered as a continuation of Khāqāni's attitude toward the pre-Islamic past. The destruction of the Sasanian palace, to this pious Muslim, was due to Khosrow II Parviz's tearing up Prophet Mohammad's letter. Thus, that "damned, evil" king paid a great price for his sin and fell a victim to his son's murderous ambitions.

But the Indian prince was also in awe with the ancient glory that once existed at Ctesiphon. Looking at the ruined condition of the palace, Abdul Hossein considered how "the Madāʾen was [once] the place from which the Kayān kings ruled the whole world."[301] world."[301] And almost automatically, he is reminded of Khāqāni: "It is indeed a very tall building and it is in ruins now. In some places, the walls and the roof are still standing. I watched these with an eye for admonishment" (*in rā dideh-ye ʿebrat kardam*).[302] The Qurʿanic verses Abdul Hossein chants after pondering the ruins tends to suggest a different take on the circumstances that led to the destruction of the Sasanian capital. Part of the verse referred to here reads: "[Allah] cast terror in their hearts so that they ruined their houses with their own hands and the hands of the believers" (59:2). To this observer,

[300] Abdul Hussein, *Tazkerat ul-Tarīq*, eds. Jaʿfaiyān and Doghān, 13.

[301] Abdul Hussein, *Tazkerat ul-Tarīq*, eds. Jaʿfaiyān and Doghān, 244. According to early Persian epic, Kayāniān or the Kayanids were a dynasty that ruled Iran before the Achaemenians. For "Kayān kings" see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Kayāniān".

[302] Abdul Hussein, *Tazkerat ul-Tarīq*, eds. Jaʿfaiyān and Doghān, 244.



Picture 6: aerial photograph of Ctesiphon ruins by the Tigris River

Sasanians destroyed their glories "with their own hands," assisting the Muslims in their conquest of Iran.[303]

To the talented poet, painter and land surveyor, Mohammad Nasir Forsat ul-Dowleh Shirazi (1854-1920), the ruins of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon were similarly a relic of Islam's victory over ancient Iran. In his comprehensive work of history, geography and antiquarianism, *Āsār-e ʿAjam* (Works of Non-Arabs, 1896), we find details of his 1886 visit to the Ctesiphon ruins on his way to Iraq.

Like many pilgrims, Forsat starts his account with expressing admiration for the Persian companion of the Prophet and his desire to visit his grave. Once done with his pilgrimage, Forsat starts inspecting the remains of the Sasanian palace. A sketch he composed on site (no. 44 in his book) shows the Sasanian palace before the collapse of its right wing. Forsat entertained both a respect for pre-Islamic Iran and a glorification of Islam because of its victory over it. A crack he found in the arch of the Sasanian palace reminded him of a story about Prophet Mohammad's birth. This apocryphal story was inspired by a couplet from Saʿdi of Shiraz, a well-known thirteenth century poet:

> When his fame was acknowledged by all,
> Tremors appeared in Kasrā's portico.
>
> *Cho sitash dar afvāh-e donyā fetād*
> *Tazalzol dar eivān-e kasrā nahād*.[304]

[303] Abdul Hussein, *Tazkerat ul-Tarīq*, eds. Jaʿfaiyān and Doghān, 244. Part of the verse referred to here reads: "[Allah] cast terror in their hearts so that they ruined their houses with their own hands and the hands of the believers" (59:2).

[304] Forsat, *Āsār-e ʿAjam* (Works of Non-Arabs), ed. Rastegār-Fasāʾī, 609.

Forsat concluded his description of the ruins by paying special homage to Khāqāni. To him, any person looking at the ruins "with an eye for admonishment" (*bedideh-ye ʿebrat*) should feel sympathy for the glory that once existed there.[305] This sentiment prepared for a quotation from Khāqāni's *qasideh* where the poet describes the ancient glory of the pre-Islamic site. A final anecdote about how the ʿAbbāsid caliphs sought and failed to destroy the Sasanian palace brings Forsat's account to an end. The source of this anecdote is not mentioned in the text.

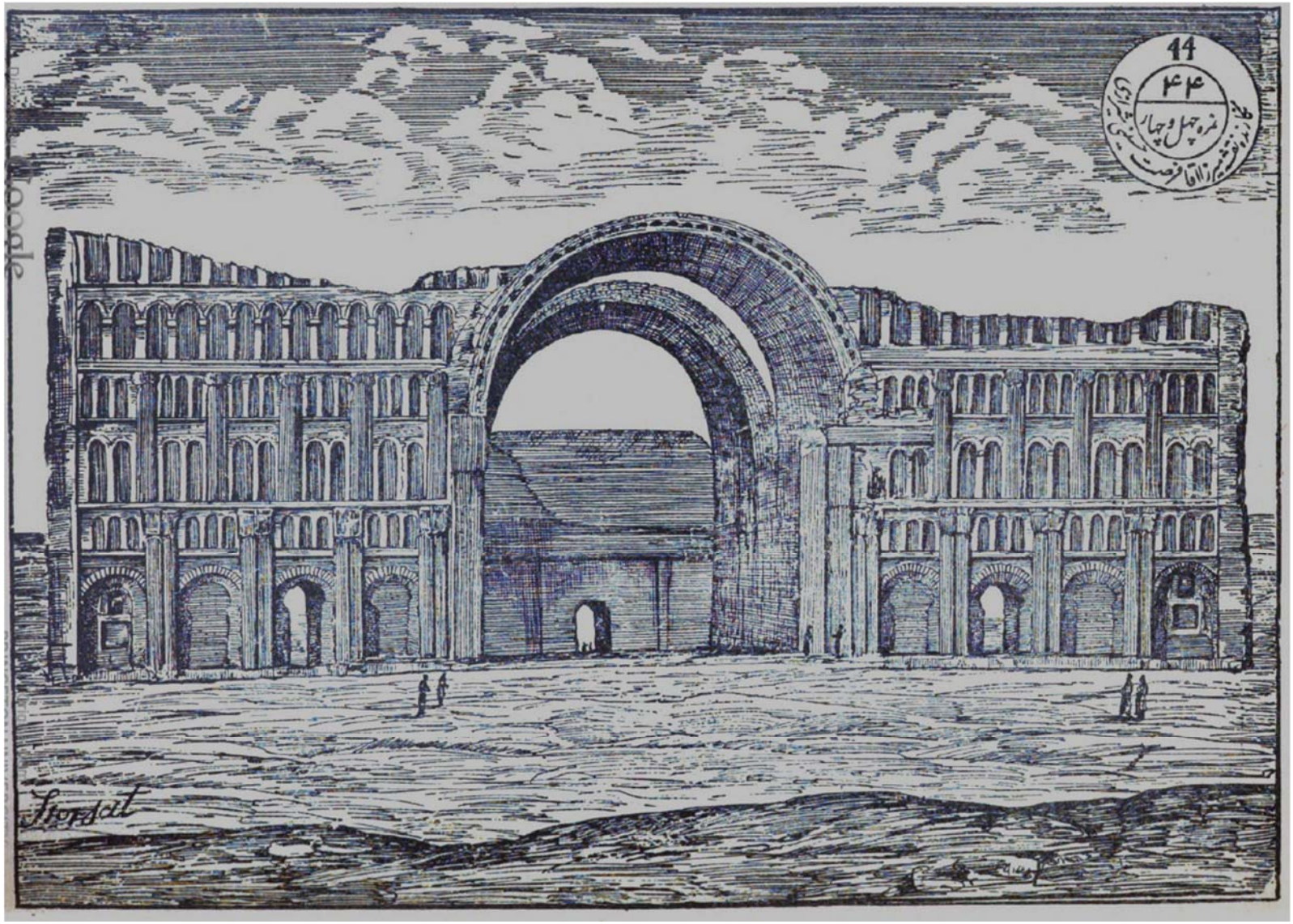
Other visits to the Ctesiphon site reveal fascinating information about the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In an account by Muhammad ʿAli Haji Pirzādeh (1835-1904), the Qajar Sufi and traveler, for the first time we learn about the dimensions of the Sasanian palace and the materials that had gone into its construction. Most importantly, Haji Pirzādeh notes how the ancient palace had been seriously vandalized:

> Around the arch there used to be many buildings that were completely demolished. Their bricks were taken away completely. Some massive wooden poles were noted inside the walls and the foundation surrounding the arch. Some of these were broken and were lying on the ground.[306]

Upon inquiry, he discovers that some of the wood was taken by his ship's captain who used it to build "spectacular and antique" furniture. It appears that the captain was aware of the antiquity of his material as he used the word *ʿatiqeh* ("antique") to refer to what he had built. Haji Pirzādeh appears to be among the first Persian travelers taking note of the

[305] Forsat, *Āsār-e ʿAjam* (Works of Non-Arabs), ed. Rastegār-Fasāʾī, 612.

[306] Haji Pirzādeh, *Safarnāmeh* (Travelogue), ed. Farmānfarmāʾiyān, 386.



Picture 7: the first known sketch of Ctesiphon by
a Persian antiquary, Forsat ud-Dowleh (1896)

crumbling state of the ancient building. A sincere wish for preservation of the ancient building captures the epistemological shift I have been describing in this chapter.

It was within these coordinates that Mirzādeh ʿEshqi visited the Ctesiphon ruins in 1916. It is remarkable how ʿEshqi's visit to the ruins of Ctesiphon brought about a shift in the Qurʿanic paradigm (described above), replacing it with the antiquarian discourse of modern Persian nationalism. ʿEshqi arguably resolved the ambivalence we find in Khāqāni by restaging the conquest of Iran as a racial clash between "civilized" Persians and "barbaric" Arabs. The "footprints of a barefooted Arab" he found at the ruins of Ctesiphon cast the Arab Muslims not as the harbingers of a new religion but as an ethnically inferior people, possessing degenerate characteristics. As a result, the dynamics of attraction and repulsion we found in Khāqāni was recast into an aggressive racial anthropological narrative that promoted Arab "inferiority" based on newly discovered racial imaginaries. In this new narrative, pious reverence for the Islamic conquests gave its place to a relentless antagonism toward the Arabs "invaders" whose role in that narrative was merely to arouse hatred and disgust in works such as ʿEshqi's.

It is indeed ironic that in the new nationalist narrative that emerged by the turn of the twentieth century in Iran, the pious pilgrim *en route* to Mecca gave its place to the refugee who was fleeing to Istanbul (the new "Mecca" for the Persian elite). ʿEshqi's recollection of the Ctesiphon ruins relocated them to the center of an emergent discourse of antiquarianism that canonized those ruins, along with many other pre-Islamic sites such as the Persepolis, as "monuments" of Iran's ancient civilization. The process of recontextualization that began during this time sought to restore what the nationalists

considered as missing in the dominant Islamic narrative – what they considered to be their purloined past.

Khāqāni's hybrid trope and ʿEshqi's re-emplotment of the narrative of the conquest of Iran serve as foundational moments for the anti-Arab discourse we are going to find in the writings of the important modern writer, Sadeq Hedayat (1903-51). As we shall see in the next chapter, the young Hedayat availed himself of the foregoing capital to champion a new era of anti-Arab representation in Persian literature that reached unprecedented heights of hatred and indignation in 1920s and 1930s. His satirical work, *A Muslim Delegation* may very well be considered as the freak child of Persian literature for its bizarre portrayal of Arabs. As I shall argue in the next chapter, the spectacularization of the Arabs reached a whole new level in the above narrative when Hedayat paraded the Arabs in a "human zoo" (ethnological exhibition) in Berlin. By submitting the Arabs to the category of "savages," he appropriated the ideology of many colonial texts to display the Arabs side-by-side the exotic beasts of Europe's colonies.

Such a grotesque representation brought to the fore the legacy of a discourse of animalization that informed certain popular Persian practices such as *taʿziyeh* performances (discussed in Chapter One). Hedayat arguably mobilized the legacy of this discourse of animalization to reinvent the Arabs as new monsters. Such a recrudescence of tropes of animalization was encouraged by the racial anthropological assumptions of certain European Orientalists such as Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882). The German philosopher's racial representations of the Semite Arabs were very popular in Iran in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter Three: Sadeq Hedayat and the Spectacle of "Savage" Arabs: Archaeology and Anthropology at the Age of Nationalism

We may not fully understand the representation of Arabs in Hedayat's works without probing the ideological background through which they were realized. It may be argued that the pervasive antiquarianism that tend to inform several of his works functioned as an ideological prism through which he perceived the Arabs. His profound preoccupation with Iran's pre-Islamic monuments, and the spectacular history he identified in them, inspired him to represent ancient Iran in contradistinction to the latter, whom for him qualified as "barbaric" destroyers of that spectacular history. Hedayat's antiquarian imagination introduced novel tropes and discourses in his fiction. Romantically reviving the fire of Zoroastrianism is one such trope. Another one concerns the Arabs whose discursive construction in his works cohere around the destruction they wreaked on the Sasanian Iran. As I argued in the Introduction, examining the Eurocentric reality Hedayat inhabited in his early travel narrative, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World, 1932) can help us understand how he mobilized a repertoire of European tropes in order to construct the image of Arabs in racial anthropological terms as "barbarians" and "savages" in his travel narrative and other works as well.

In this chapter, I shall try to demonstrate how recrudescence of anti-Arab representation in modern Iran in 1920s and 1930s thrived on brand new tropes and discourses. The career of Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951) provides an excellent example of this trend, which in a way is shaped by an intertextual conversation between the ideological

capital we find in certain works of the Persianate tradition, and those ideologies and imagery that are associated with European colonial literature. The antiquarianism that permeates his *oeuvre* gave rise to a spectacular image of the ancient past that was untouched by the senseless brutality of the Arab Muslims who invaded Iran in the seventh century. After examining the dynamics of his antiquarian imagination in his (mostly historical) works, I shall try to investigate how the image of Arabs was discursively manufactured especially in his satirical works. The two works I will examine in detail in this chapter are *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon, posthumously published in 1979; henceforth *The Pearl Canon*) and *al-Beʿsat ul-Islāmiyyah fi Belād al-Afranjiyyah* (A Muslim Delegation in the European Lands, posthumously published in 1985; henceforth *A Muslim Delegation*). In these satirical works, Hedayat submits the Arabs to the category of "savages" and explores their alterity from an entirely Eurocentric standpoint. The unabashedly racist rhetoric we find in Hedayat's works have not been the subject of rigorous academic study so far. This is partly because of the fact that these works constitute one of the most radical niches in the entirety of the Persianate tradition when it comes to the representation of Arabs.[307]

A novelty of Hedayat's works involves his "modernizing" the tropes of animalization we found in the Persianate tradition (see animalization in *taʿziyeh* performances discussed in Chapter One) by grafting them onto some of the most relentless tropes and discourses that are commonly associated with European colonialism. Parading the Arabs in an

[307] An anti-Arab rhetoric similar to Hedayat's is taken up by certain Afghan poets such as Birang Kūhdāmani (1951-2007) who sees the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan as a modern-day Arab invasion. See Rāvash, *Seh Vākonesh* (Three Reactions) for sample poetry.

anthropological exhibition ("human zoos") in Berlin in order to classify their Arabo-Islamic culture as "barbaric" is a grotesque outcome of this ideological cross-fertilization. The representations we find in Hedayat were mediated by the findings of European sciences of archaeology and anthropology (popular in Iran in 1920s and 1930s). Through these findings he transformed the "demonic" Arabs of works like the *Shāhnāmeh* (1010 CE) into grotesque monstrosities that are alien to anything modern. As I shall try to explain in this chapter, Hedayat revamped an image that derived from Zoroastrian demonological imaginings by recasting it through ideologies that had precursors in European practices of "human zoos" and early colonial cinema.

Uncritical appropriation of European sciences of archaeology and anthropology arguably diminished the *anti-colonial* aspirations of modern writers like Mirzādeh ʿEshqi and Sadeq Hedayat since it made them mirror in their writings the very repressive discourses they wished to subvert. This was because deploying the particular discourse of "othering" they appropriated from European (colonial) sources transformed these writers' emancipatory efforts into what may be described as cultural colonization of another subaltern group – the Arabs. The narrative authority ʿEshqi and Hedayat deployed against the Arabs in their texts shared great affinities with the authority of the (cartographic) gaze we find in the so-called colonial literature. It may also be argued that ʿEshqi and Hedayat's approximating the tropes and discourses that European writers unleased against their Indian and/or African "others" turned these two Persian writers into would-be colonial surrogates.

Faced with the sociopolitical degeneration he identified in contemporary Iran, Hedayat sought refuge in a distant past that was ideal and spectacular. Ancient monuments, as the

relics of that glorious past, are wrapped in his stories in an aura of magic and supernatural power. Sometimes they serve as settings for occult rituals and cultic activities, and at other times they are inhabited by passionate archaeologists, dazzled by their otherworldly splendor. Whatever the purpose or the occasion, the ancient ruins in Hedayat are haunted by the ghosts of the past.

In a short story titled "Gojasteh Dezh" ("The Cursed Fortress," 1932), the ruins of an ancient fortress are associated with the mystique of secret cults and black magic. At the beginning of the story we learn that the original owner of this fortress was Mākān, a character based on the Sasanian prince, Khosrow II, who in medieval romances such as Nezāmi's *Khosrow and Shirin* fall in love with Shirin, an Armenian princess. (These historical sub-texts are treated superficially in the narrative and never taken up by the end of the story.) The evil alchemist occupying this fortress uses it for preparing secret recipes for turning everything into gold. Like a gothic story, Hedayat filled the dark dungeons of this fortress with blue vapors and occult rituals associated with black magic. In the dark recesses of Mākān's fortress, the alchemist gives Hedayat an opportunity to experiment with expressionistic portrayals. For example, on the eve of his big discovery, we read that the alchemist's "voice [saying "Gold! Gold!"] echoed in the dungeon. He suddenly stopped in front of the oven without saying anything and looked at the rusty-colored liquid. Then resumed his gloomy posture and crept toward the oven."[308]

In another short story, the ruins of an ancient site near Shiraz became the setting for supernatural activities involving a reawakened mummy. In "Takht-e Abu-Nasr" (The

[308] Hedayat, "Gojasteh Dezh" (Evil Castle), 212.

Abu-Nasr Rock, 1942) we follow the adventures of an American archaeological expedition (funded by Metropolitan Museum of Chicago) that discovers a mummy belonging to Sīmveyh, the ancient governor of the region the archaeologists are excavating. An amulet on Sīmveyh's mummy instructs the archaeologists to perform certain occult rituals so that he could be reawakened. Hedayat's symbolically reawakening an ancient governor was like resurrecting Iran's Sasanian heritage. However, the historical underpinnings of the narrative and especially the implications of resurrecting the Sasanian past were left unexplored as the narrative progressed.

The ancient setting of the story and especially the activities of the American excavators provided occasions in the narrative for descriptions that glow with archaeological detail. Occasionally, the information conveyed reveals Hedayat's knowledge of archaeological minutia; for example, when the narrator explained that the site of The Abu-Nasr Rock contained masonry pilfered from the Persepolis site. Hedayat created an aura of antiquarian authenticity in his tale by peppering the text of the amulet with Middle Persian (Pahlavi) lexicon steeped in Zoroastrian lore. For example, one of the archaeologists characterizes the mummy's "pseudo death" (*mūt-e kāzeb*) as *būshāsp* which in Middle Persian stood for "sleep". In a similar manner, Sīmveyh's betrayal of his wife and plans for marrying a young girl named Khorshīd is described as *khvedūdah* ("kin-marriage") which in Zoroastrianism stood for the practice of having more than one wife at a time.

The occult aspects of the story occasionally cast an aura of mystery on the ancient site's landscape. Thus, when Sīmveyh's mummy is finally reawakened, the morbid sight of his walking dead put the ancient landscape of Abu-Nasr Rock under a spell.

Reminiscent of ʿEshqi's *Shroud*, the narrator pauses the narrative to reflect on the luminous moonlight embracing the ancient landscape:

> A light breeze was blowing. The sky was like a leaden cap, heavy and luminescent. A striking brightness, descending as if from the moon, was covering the hillside. It had turned the nature pale and lifeless. It was as though this scenery was out of this world. On the right, the Gate of Persepolis with its black stones was the only building that had survived from the past. The rest was ditches and channels whose grovel had turned into dust.[309]

The three characters in this story were based on the American archaeologists that worked at The Abu-Nasr Rock site in 1930s.[310] The fact that no mummy was ever discovered there turned Hedayat's story into a fantasy flavored with archaeological adventurism and experimentations in narrative suspense and horror. The sarcophagus (*tābūt-e sangi*), reawakened mummy and magical amulet were tropes Hedayat apparently borrowed from popular mummy movies of 1920s and 1930s since they have no precedence in Persian literature before him. Examining stories such as "Takht-e Abu-Nasr" vis-à-vis popular movies like *Mummy* (1932) can provide insight about the impact

[309] Hedayat, "Takht-e Abu-Nasr" (Abu-Nasr Rock), 323.

[310] For general information on archaeological excavations at the site of Abu-Nasr Rock see Whitcomb, *Before the Roses and Nightingales*. For recently published Persian correspondence relating to this expedition, especially Reza Shah's approving the activities of Metropolitan Museum, see Yazdāni, *Asnād-e Heiʾat-hā-ye Bāstān-shenāsi dar Iran* (Documents of Archaeological Missions in Iran), 283-99. For US National Archives documents relating to relocation and display of excavated objects at Chicago's Metropolitan Museum see Majd, *The Great American Plunder of Persia's Antiquities: 1925-1941*, 110-13.

of Western "Egyptomania" on the emergence of antiquarianism in Iran in late nineteenth century.[311]

In a third short story, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper, 1930), Hedayat used two nineteenth-century European antiquarians by the names of Eugène Flandin (1809-1889) and Pascal-Xavier Coste (1787-1879) to present an intimate picture of Iran's ancient ruins reconstructed through archaeological discoveries. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the trope of reviving the past found ample expressions in Hedayat's writings. He took this trope seriously enough to light a fire in the ruins of the Zoroastrian fire temple he visited near Isfahan (described in his travelogue). In this short story, a scene from ancient Iran was brought back to life by Hedayat in an effort to highlight its timeless beauty and relevance to modern Iran.

We meet Eugène Flandin in a bar in Paris, telling a friend about the strange episode occurring to him at Naqsh-e Rostam, the ancient necropolis near Persepolis. Amazed by his impulse for spiritual things, Flandin confessed to his friend that he had "worshipped God only once in [his] life in all sincerity. It was in Iran and near that fire alter" at Naqsh-e Rostam.[312] While performing archaeological measurements (*andāzeh-giri*) under the oppressive sun, Flandin noticed two figures appearing on the horizon. Dressed "differently from the ordinary Iranians," the figures turn out to be Zoroastrians visiting

[311] For the history of "Egyptomania" in the West see Curl, *Egyptomania: The Egyptian Ideal, a Recurring theme in the History of Taste* (1994).

[312] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 50. This particular fire temple is known as *Kaʿbeh-ye Zartosht* ("Kaʿba [or Cube] of Zoroaster"). For speculations on the other uses of this building see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Kaʿba-ye Zartosht."

the so-called "Kaʿba of Zoroaster" in order to perform religious rituals. In utter amazement, the European explorer observes how nimbly they prepare a small pyre before they start saying prayers in front of its fire: "They murmured in a language that I hadn't heard before. It seemed to be the language of Zoroaster and the *Avesta*. Perhaps it was the language that was engraved on the rock reliefs in cuneiform script!"[313] Mesmerized by the spectacle of the two Zoroastrians, Flandin noticed loosing track of time:

> I raised my head and saw that on the rock at the top of the catacomb (*dakhmeh*) in front of me, the gathering engraved on the stone was identical to the living gathering I was watching in front of me. I froze in my place. It was as though these people had risen from the stone on the top of Darrius' catacomb (*qabr*) and after thousands of years had come to worship their deity in front of me![314]

The merging of past and present ushered a phantasmagoria of the ancient Zoroastrians coming back to life in an uninterrupted cycle of ritualistic performance. Like many contemporary writers, Hedayat distilled insight about ancient Zoroastrians from monumental rocks reliefs at sites such as Naqsh-e Rostam. The spectacle of ancient kings performing timeless rituals was arguably a continuation of what we had seen in writers such as Mirzādeh ʿEshqi and Khāqāni before him. The emphasis on the Zoroastrians reenacting a timeless rituals performed in front of Flandin arguably turned pre-Islamic Iran into a *spectacle* made for the European observer's visual consumption. This potentially Orientalist residue may be considered in tandem with certain details in this story where ruins predominate the landscape in Iran and the Persian women are

[313] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 51.

[314] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 51-2.

"Oriental beauties."[315] Admiring the Zoroastrians' piety, Flandin went on to reflect on their tenacity and determination in upholding their religious rituals:

> I was amazed how after all this time, and despite the efforts of the Muslims for destroying this religion, this ancient faith still had followers who secretly but in open air prostrated in front of fire![316]

Reminiscent of his observations about the ancient fire temple near Isfahan, Hedayat projected his idealistic assumptions about pre-Islamic Iran onto Flandin so that the European traveler would *authenticate* what Hedayat had in mind. As a result, Flandin almost unconsciously had to discard his "nationality, character and environment" in order to prostrate in front of the fire ancient kings of Iran had worshipped.[317] The remains of the fire the two Zoroastrians (symbolically) left behind functioned like a beacon, asking Flandin to take refuge into ancient Iran so that "like ancient Persian kings who worshipped fire" he could become a Zoroastrian.[318] Similar to the evil alchemist's blue vapors, the "blue smoke" rising from these ashes cast a magical spell on the ancient landscape of Naqsh-e Rostam:

> […] the shadow of crumbled stones, the sky's blurry borders and the shining stars that blinked above my head [bestowed] a quiet charm onto the magnificent plateau with its mysterious ruins and antique fire temples. It was as though the

[315] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 50. Hedayat expressed a similar idea in his travel narrative when he came across Zoroastrians farmers working on a field. Commenting on their dresses, he observed: "The same dress that their forefathers wore and could still be seen in Persepolis [bas-reliefs]." Hedayat, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), 69.

[316] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 52. Flandin's interlocutor at the bar embodied these stereotypical aspects in the story.

[317] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 52.

[318] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 53.

> spirit of the dead and their mental powers were flying over these catacombs and crumbled stones.[319]

Hedayat's antiquarian imagination distilled images from contemporary archaeological discoveries at sites such as Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis in order to construct awe-inspiring representations that purported to be authentic as well. It is interesting to note that, in the antiquarian stories examined here, diminishing adherence to archaeological authenticity tended to give rise to an increase in exotic, supernatural elements such as occult rituals and reawakened mummies. A similar argument may also be made about antiquarianism in Hedayat's other works where archaeological and/or historical research as a source of representation (for example, in early works such as *Parvin* and "Ātash-parast") gave way to sensational tropes and narrative techniques Hedayat borrowed from popular Western sources such as early cinema (for example, in the last two short stories examined above).

Reception of archaeology in Hedayat was not only limited to casting archaeologist characters and gazing at their exotic adventures. Several other works in his *oeuvre* show some degree of archaeological awareness, either in the form of knowledge of European excavations in Iran or by employing technical archaeological jargon. Hedayat's commitment to recreate the semblances of the ancient past relied on archaeological information he distilled from various historical and/or modern sources. Studying the manner he assembled his ancient spectacles can help us understand how the image of Arabs was discursively constructed as a palimpsestic entity.

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[319] Hedayat, "Ātash-parast" (Fire Worshipper), 52.

In his early play, *Parvin* (1930), Hedayat presented an extravagant picture of Sasanian life shortly before it was invaded by the Arab Muslims. From its opulent props to the actors' sumptuous costumes, almost everything in this play exudes wealth and magnificence. The spectacles he crafted were meticulously assembled from what he found in scholarly works published by certain European Orientalists. Several footnotes in the play base the supposed historicism of these spectacles on the latest findings of "historians" and/or "historical documents." Some of the names Hedayat cited in these footnotes included early twentieth-century luminaries such as Arthur Christensen, James Darmesteter and Friedrich Sarre. As an apparent exercise in the archaeological theatre ʿEshqi popularized in Iran in 1920s and 1930s, everything in *Parvin* was made to invoke the latest archaeological findings concerning the material culture of the Sasanian Iran.

In order to see how Hedayat mobilized archaeological information in an effort to reconstruct the semblances of ancient Iran in his antiquarian play, I suggest examining the manner he a) fashioned his play's ancient setting, and b) represented a Sasanian soldier called Parviz after certain pre-Islamic models. Through these aspects I shall try to show how Hedayat's antiquarian spectacles in fact were palimpsestic constructions pieced together from various sources of information. Then, I will argue that a similar discursive outlook may be identified in the representation of Arabs in *Parvin*, which demonstrates a similar palimpsestic construction – that is, it is assembled from a repertoire of anti-Arab texts that I shall discuss in some detail in the coming pages.

Parvin and Ancient Trauma Made Modern

Judging from the date on the play's manuscript (Dec 12, 1928), Hedayat's historical play appears to be the first fictional work he completed after *Favā'ed-e Giyāh-khāri* (Benefits of Vegetarianism), a short pamphlet he published in Berlin in 1927. A note on the first page of *Parvin* claimed historical authority for what it represented on the stage: "This play depicts the events of the year 22 AH [632 CE] at the peak of battles between the Arabs and Iranians in the city of Ray (Rāghā) near present-day Tehran. The setting's architecture has been embellished (*peirāyesh shodeh*) and its interiors fashioned after late Sasanian ways."[320] Scene description to Act I sheds light on how the setting of Hedayat's traumatic narrative of invasion and conquest was an idyllic portico (*eivān*) fashioned "after Sasanian and Achaemenian" models:

> [The portico] has two short columns with horse heads [*setūn-e kalleh asbī*] on the top. They rest on a square on the floor. The columns are covered with decorations in brown. The portico is elevated by two steps. Two carved wood doors could be seen. A silk rug with bright colors is lying on the floor. An old table and stool are on the front. On the right there is a big tree. A pile of flowers on the front. A little farther, the landscape of a valley and the Damavand Mountain could be seen.[321]

Hedayat appears to have been aware of the fact that he was recreating his pre-Islamic Iran *ahistorically* as his *mise en scène* evoked vaguely specific pasts onstage. Admitting to "embellish" the portico's interiors may be read as a remark on his unrealistic assemblage. These embellishments came from various scholarly publications. An important source of information was European studies of pre-Islamic art and material culture. As he tells us in

[320] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 9.

[321] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 11.

a footnote, a plate in Friedrich Sarre's *Die Kunst Des Alten Persien* (1922) gave Hedayat an idea for his center piece in Act II. The careful though non-specialist descriptions of this plate additionally reveal Hedayat's enthusiasm for art criticism:

> There is a silken drape in front of the door that has golden fringes. Its margins have floral decorations. There is a young king at the middle of it that rides an imaginary horse: it has the body of a lion, the head of a vulture, and ears of a horse with two enormous wings. Sleeping at his feet, there is a lion. The king is fighting another lion. A ram is running above [them].[322]

The play's *mise en scène* in Act III focuses on the opulence of the Sasanian Iran by displays of treasures and valuables. In addition to showcasing the material magnificence of ancient Iran, these displays implied that the Arabs invaded Iran only for looting its riches. As I shall explain in the next section, troping the Arabs as bloodthirsty highwaymen denied arguments about their coming to Iran for spreading a new religion. Troping the Arabs as thieves and highwaymen endeavored to delegitimize the Islamic conquest of Iran by discrediting its massagers as they were driven by ungodly motives. As Parvin chided an Arab translator: "You used religion as a pretext. Your goal was world-conquering, embezzlement and brutality."[323]

The list of valuables filling the stage in this scene again derived from recent archaeological excavations catalogued in Sarre's book:

> We see a magnificent hall […]. There is a small alcove with several oil lamps burning inside it. On the right, there is a seat whose small legs are carved like a lion's claws, and its top, like a lion's head. It is sitting at the corner. There are several silken cushions and pillows in rich colors resting on the seat. […] On the

[322] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 29.

[323] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 45.

> other side of the bed, incense smoke is coming out of a brass urn. Its two big round handles have made it look like a fire temple (*ātash-kadeh*).[324]

The collage of expensive artifacts associated with fire-worship represented the objects Hedayat associated with Sasanian and Achaemenian Iran. These archaeologically informed displays were complemented by a plot that purported to be based on *real* events. As Hedayat claimed in an early note, his narrative was "based on historical realities as much as possible."[325] As a result, ubiquitous footnotes advertised the historical sources and/or authorities he consulted for reconstructing his dramatic narrative of invasion of Sasanian Iran. For example, a character's claim about the Arabs "selling [Persian] girls" in slave markets in Arabia was defended in a footnote: "Based on historical documents the Arabs commonly sold girls."[326] Important events in the plot, such as latest developments in fights between the Persians and the Arabs, were similarly framed by the authority of certain historical sources such as Tabari's account of Arab conquests. As another footnote pointed out, "according to historians" the Daylamites came to the Persians' rescue before the latter ultimately succumbed to the invading Arabs.[327]

It is interesting to note that these footnotes rarely identified the Persian sources Hedayat relied on for constructing his historical plot. This was contrary to his habit of meticulously citing his Western sources. This was perhaps because Hedayat approached his Persian sources through the mediation of Western scholars whose discoveries in the

[324] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 41.

[325] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 11.

[326] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 13.

[327] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 24.

fields of history and archaeology impressed Hedayat profoundly. As I mentioned above, James Darmesteter, Arthur Christensen and Friedrich von Spiegel were some of the luminaries giving weight to his historical deliberations in the footnotes. No Persian historian and/or historical resource is cited here by name.

An aspect of the magnificence Hedayat's antiquarian *mise en scène* invoke onstage included reviving famous ancient characters. The spectacular representation of the play's hero, a larger-than-life elite guard named Parviz, followed ʿEshqi's tradition of resurrecting Zoroaster, Parviz II and Darrius in *Resurrection*. Named after a well-known Sasanian king celebrated for his legendary wealth, Parviz embodied the "glory and magnificence" (*farr u shokūh*) Hedayat projected onto ancient Iran.[328] The way this ancient character is described in the stage directions reveals the impact of archaeological information:

> Parviz: Parvin's fiancé. He is 25 years old. In "Immortal Guards" outfit: round hood, curly black hair, bow and quiver, dagger, and red booths. A short string with two hooks on either end connects the front of his outfit. The quiver strap passes on it. Everything [in him] emanates glory and magnificence. He looks confident and fearless.[329]

Parviz was projected to be the idealized protector of Iran, cast in the image of the Immortal Guards who were elite soldiers under Achaemenians and Sasanians. He epitomized the legendary devotion the Immortal Guards possessed for safeguarding the

[328] For the legends surrounding the wealth and power of Khosrow II Parvēz see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Khosrow II" (Howard-Johnston) and *Dā'erat ul-Moāref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi* (The Great Encyclopedia of Islam) s.v., "Khosrow Parviz" (Bāzargan).

[329] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 10.

greatness of their country.[330] Parviz's military regalia and fierce, stylized posture was apparently inspired by the reproduction of a bas-relief of Immortal Guards Hedayat found in Sarre's book on ancient Persian art. Parviz's courageous fight against the Arabs and eventual death mobilized this particular legacy. As we saw above in my discussion of Āzari's utilizing "historical lithographs" for reconstructing his Immortal Guards on-stage, contemporary archaeological information played a critical role in Hedayat's creating an aura of authenticity for Hedayat's ancient plot and historical characters.

The simulacrum of antiquity Hedayat strived to construct in his play occasionally crumbled under the influence of European popular culture. As I argued in the Introduction, certain Eurocentric elements found their way into Hedayat's travelogue, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), especially after he indulged himself in the luxuries he associated with a European lifestyle. The "cinema" of romantic recollections he presented at the end of his narrative may be understood as a *metonym* for the spectral reality Hedayat manufactured for himself in his travelogue. The exotic music of Hawaiian steel guitar, echoing in the ancient ruins of Isfahan, provided a fitting soundtrack to his Eurocentric experience.

Another related observation in the travelogue can help us understand the underpinnings of the spectral reality Hedayat crafted for himself. The section I have in mind tends to reveal how Hedayat perceived the spectral reality surrounding him through the lens of contemporary Western cinema. This is how he conceived his impressions about an old shrine in Isfahan:

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[330] For the Immortal Guards see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Immortals."

> Shrine of Saint Esmāʿil – located at some remote neighborhood. To get there, one must pass through narrow alleyways that are dry and without trees. These alleyways are surrounded by towering walls like those of a castle. The labyrinthine houses send you back thousands of years. All these embellishments (*pirāyesh-hā*) are perfect for displaying secrets in Oriental movies (*namāyesh-e asrār-e film-hā-ye ma-shreqi*). They immediately reminded me of well-known embellishers of cinema like Fritz Lang and Best-Jaris Pomere who got new inspirations whenever they looked at these alleyways.[331]

Hedayat re-presented images of Persian antiquity through the lens of so-called Oriental movies in order to create an aura of mystery for them. As a matter of fact, it may be argued that Isfahan and its antiquity had an appeal to him since certain Europeans had praised them in the past. But Hedayat failed to prevent those observers' Eurocentric outlook as his representations tend to rehearse the problematic ideologies many European included in their depictions of so-called "Orientals" as ancient, ahistorical and regressive. Walking in his country's antiquities sent Hedayat back in time since the so-called "Orient" often provides a setting for European travelers to move back in time where the ancient anachronistically lives side-by-side the modern. This process of self-fashioning amounted to what may be described as Hedayat's self-Orientalization, especially he failed to perceive the detrimental underpinnings of the ideologies he *mimicked* them in his fiction and personal life.

It is interesting to note that a similarly constructed reality effect may also be found in Act I Scene II of Hedayat's early play, *Parvin*. In this scene, we find Parvin sitting down with her harp so that his father could paint her portrait. Finding her particularly quiet, her father asks her to play some music: "Why you're not playing your harp today? Play

[331] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 99.

one of your exhilarating songs. Play a Bārbad for me."[332] The stage directions describe Parvin's reaching out for her instrument: "The girl languidly picks up the harp and plays a sad and tragic melody. Chehreh-pardāz [her father] puts down his paints and listens to the music. He then spreads his scroll, looks at the girl and [again] at the paper" to paint her. Wishing to enhance the scene's nostalgic atmosphere, Hedayat suggested in a footnote that Parvin could play Korsakov's symphonic suit, *Scheherazade* (1888).[333] In line with what I argued above, it is striking how European classical music could seamlessly substitute for the ancient music of Bārbad for Hedayat! Bringing to mind the exotic sound of Hawaiian steel guitar echoing in Isfahan, Hedayat's letting Korsakov's music to resound in the ancient city of Ray arguably was another example of his inability to prevent his Eurocentric tendencies from bleeding into the archaeologically informed picture he constructed in his play. These juxtapositions additionally tend to speak of Hedayat's associating ancient Iran with Europeans since in the two texts discussed here his most intimate reminisces about the former were interlaced with some sort of Western music. The music of European discoverers of ancient Iran, in other words, reverberated in Hedayat's mind and fiction as he immersed himself in Orientalist publications. As I shall explain in the latter half of this chapter, Hedayat's imagining himself as a European, had far-reaching implications for the image of Arabs in his thought and philosophy. Modern Persians as Europeans opened the door for highly problematic tropes and discourses for hierarchizing the Arabs as "savages" and "barbarians."

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[332] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 17. Bārbad was the celebrated minstrel-poet of the court of the Sasanian king Khosrow II Parviz. See *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Bārbad."

[333] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 17.

As we saw above, Hedayat's footnotes open up a window that can let us have a glimpse at the many texts he availed himself in order to reconstruct the grandeur he projected onto ancient Iran. They show his fascination with the material splendor of the Sasanian Empire and how European archaeological excavations could help reviving that splendor on the stage of works such as *Parvin*. However, what Hedayat has not recorded in these footnotes is a second repertoire of "historians" and/or "historical documents" that helped him assemble his anti-Arab rhetoric and imagery. The specter of wild and hideous Arabs wrapping themselves "in torn cloaks" (as delineated in his play's stage directions) or the relentlessly racist rhetoric he directed at them in the dialogues were similarly assembled from certain texts that were left unidentified by Hedayat. Reading *Parvin* vis-à-vis these anti-Arab texts can help us tease out the genealogy of the particular discourse he mobilized to represent the Arabs as separate from and inferior to the Persians. As I shall explain in the following section, a study of Persian narratives of early encounter with the invading Arabs can help us see how, from a rhetorical standpoint, the dialogues in *Parvin* were pieced together from certain Middle Persian Zoroastrian texts that posited negative sentiments about the Bedouin Arabs. This second set of "historical documents" tend to form the rhetorical backbone of Hedayat's discourse of anti-Arab representation.

In the extant narratives of early encounter, the Persians almost always perceive the Arabs with certain sense of superiority. Tabari's well-known chronicle of early Islamic conquests, *Tārikh al-Rosol va al-Molūk* (History of the Prophets and Kings, completed 923), records in detail one such encounter. As I argued in the Introduction, the Arabs are usually taunted for their uncouth appearance and humble source of subsistence. Mogherah ibn Shoʿbeh's corroborating Yazdgerd III's deprecating words about Bedouin

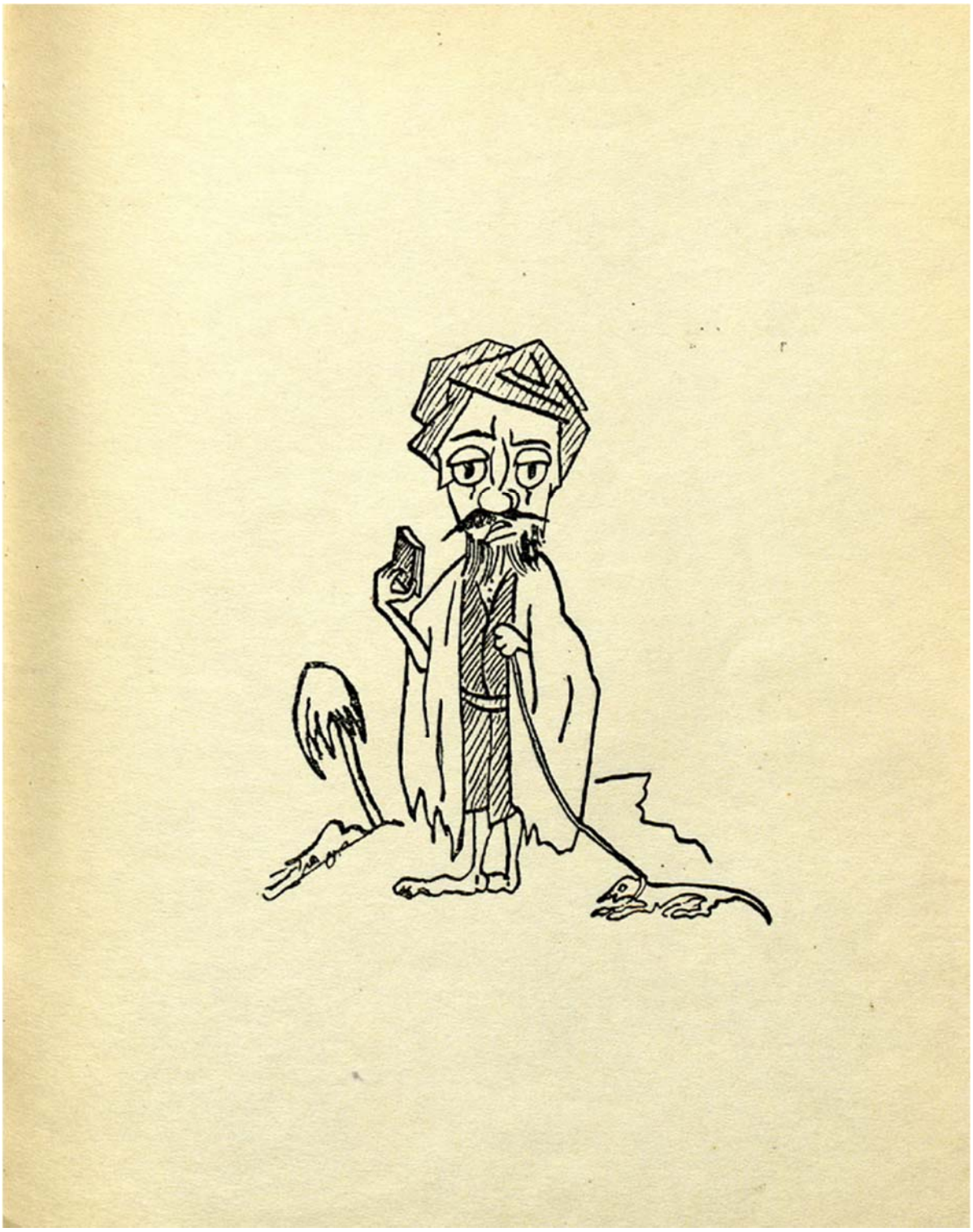
Arabs has resulted in the echoes of their give-and-take to be heard in many works dealing with the Arab "other." In these works, the Arab general's confession about eating "beetles of various sorts, scorpions, and snakes" and wearing "only what we spun from the hair of camels and sheep"[334] were taken *out of context* in an effort to prove the perceived inferiority of all Arabs in general.

Another Arabic source of presumably "authentic" information about Arabs has been Ibn Khaldūn's medieval history of the Arab people, *Muqaddimah* (The Introduction, 1377). For nineteenth-century pioneering Persian intellectuals such as Mirzā Fath ʿAli Ākhundzādeh (1812-1878), Ibn Khaldūn was a "reliable witness" (*shāhed-e moʿtamed*) whose comments about the dietary habits of Bedouin Arabs stood as facts about all Arab food. Thus, to Ākhundzādeh, a range of loathsome food such as "scorpions and beetles" (*al-ʿaqāreb wa al-khanāfis*) qualified as "authentic" information about the degeneracy of all Arabs.[335]

The medieval Persian epic, the *Shāhnāmeh* (1010), contains another description of an early encounter that in certain Persianate environments has become an important source of historical information about the Arabs. The apocalyptic predictions of the Sasanian general, Rostam Farrokhzād, in the concluding section of this book, "Pādeshāhi-ye Yazdgerd" (The Kingship of Yazdgerd), is usually read as a chronicle of the downfall of the Sasanian Empire and the coming of Arab Muslims to Iran. (Rostam Farrokhzād was the Sasanian general who was killed by the Arab Muslims when they invaded Iran in the

[334] Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. XII (ed. Friedmann), 36.

[335] Ākhundzādeh, *Maktūbāt*, 28. For prevalence of lizard as Arab food in Persian texts, see Jamshidi, "Lizard as Arab Food: Arab Representation and the *Shāhnāmeh* Scholarship."



Picture 8: Sketch of a Bedouin Arab signed by Hedayat (Jan 1935)

seventh century.) This particular section arguably resonates with a complex network of anti-Arab imagery that runs underneath its historical narration. The anti-Arab tropes we find here are exploited by writers like Hedayat to recast the Arabs as end-of-time demons arriving at a most traumatic moment of the conquest of Iran. As I shall argue in this chapter, Hedayat's play may be read as a dramatization of the Arabs' entry into the collective memory of modern (nationalist) Iranians as they were represented as ruthless warlords having an eye on Iran's treasures.

Examining the rhetoric Rostam Farrokhzād uses in the *Shāhnāmeh* for representing the Bedouin Arabs' physical features, dietary habits and dressing style – as *siyah zāgh* ("black raven"), *sūsmār-khār* ("lizard-eating") and *berahneh* ("naked"), respectively – can help us understand the extent Hedayat subscribed to the Sasanian general's anti-Arab rhetoric. Rostam Farrokhzād's observation about Bedouin Arab material culture appears to have worked for Hedayat as "authentic" information about all Arabs in general. The Sasanian general deprecated aspects of Arab dietary habits to delegitimize their claim to the Persian throne. He is said to have uttered the following words:

> […] the Arabs,
> From drinking camels' milk and eating lizards,
> Have reached a pitch whereat the Persian throne
> Is coveted! Shame, shame on circling heaven![336]
>
> *Ze shir-e shotor khordan u sūsmār*
> *Arab rā be jāi rasidast kār;*
> *Ke molk-e ʿajam-shān konad ārezūi;*

[336] Warner, *Shāhnāma of Firdausī*, 79.

tofū bād bar charkh-e gardān tofū. (v.9/p.322)[337]

The foregoing lines have been the source of many controversial debates. Claiming that the *Shāhnāmeh* has propagated anti-Arab sentiment, many readers have used these lines to give an aura of legitimacy to their anti-Arab sentiments.[338] Scholars, on the other hand, have disputed the authenticity of these lines and have attempted to exclude them from standard editions of the *Shāhnāmeh*.[339]

As we learn from Hedayat's stage directions, the Arabs in *Parvin* shared fundamental similarities with the uncouth Arabs we found in two narratives of early encounter I discussed above. This should be expected since *Parvin* purports to be a dramatization of the traumatic encounter between the two peoples during the time the Arabs were conducting relentless incursions against the Persians as part of their conquest of Iran. Imagined as a swarm of fighters, this is how the gang of Arabs are described in *Parvin*'s stage directions:

> Four Arabs: They are wrapped in torn cloaks, tied at the middle by a string. Dark faces. Coarse black beard and mustaches. They wrap their faces in dirty white scarves. Barefooted. Dusty (*ghobārālūd*). With dissimilar scimitars – ferocious and terrifying.[340]

These extras never spoke onstage and only epitomized the basic emotions Hedayat assigned to them. Provoking fear and disgust in the audiences tends to be the main reason

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[337] In critical editions of the *Shāhnāmeh* (e.g., Mohl, Moscow and Khāleghi-Motlaq) these two couplets are considered to be interpolations, and are placed in the addenda section.

[338] For the uses and abuses of the *Shāhnāmeh* by the so-called "lay intellectuals" see Omidsālār, "Iran, Eslām va Rowshan-fekrān-e ʿĀmmi" (Iran, Islam and Lay Intellectuals) 218-334.

[339] For a recent example, see Jalāl Khāleqi-Motlaq's edition of the *Shāhnāmeh*.

[340] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 17.

behind their existence in the play, in addition to giving rise to a menacing atmosphere in the play. Their grotesque costumes complemented by their aggressive behavior and senseless brutality.

The language this swarm of fighters speaks gives another indication of the discourse Hedayat used for demeaning the Arabs. The first time they speak on the stage – saying in Arabic: "Open the door, you impure dogs!" – a footnote points out that, "The parts in Arabic are fillers and may be modified" (*qesmat-hā-ye ʿArabi barā-ye khāli nabūdan-e ʿarizeh va dar taht ul-shoʿāʿ qarār migirad*).[341] Uttered untranslated either in the text or on the stage, the parts in Arabic highlight the "foreign" status of Arabic in Iran for Hedayat as an unwelcome intrusion. The amorphous quality he attributes to Arabic reduced that language to a few foreign sounds uttered by a gang of aggressive fighters. The so-called "pure" Persian Hedayat put in the mouths of his Persian characters was devoid of Arabic words, highlighting this presumed contrast.[342]

The leader of this swarm of fighters was an Arab chief borrowed as if from popular Hollywood movies:

> The Arab chief: short with a protruding belly. Thick neck. Bushy beard and mustache. Deeply furrowed brow. Large turban, a corner hanging. Simple, long cloak with lining. Large scarf. A small dagger at his belt. Barefooted with sandals

[341] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 38.

[342] Hedayat was heir to a complicated history of language purism that came to fruition at the height of modern Persian nationalism in 1930s with the establishment of *Farhangestān-e Zabān-e Fārsi* (Persian Academy). One of the primary goals of this institution was to purge the Persian language from the Arabic lexicon it had borrowed over the ages. For the history of language reform in Iran see Karimi, "Language Reform Movement and Its Language" and Dāvari, *Sarehgerā'i-ye Zabāni* (Linguistic Purism).

[*sic.*]. White underwear (*zir-shalvāri*). Dark-faced. Terrifying. Inexperienced. Pretentious.[343]

The first thing attracting attention here is how Hedayat reduced the Arab chief to a handful of gestures and emotions. Ferocity, deceit and, most importantly, abjectness captured their motives and existence perfectly for Hedayat. Compared with Sasanian characters like Parviz, who were intricately adored in their costumes and manners, the Arabs embody the opposite of the normative reality the former represents. From the outside, Hedayat wished this contrast to be overwhelming. As I explained above, the carefully realized image of Parviz as a Sasanian Immortal Guard relied on the archaeological information Hedayat discovered in Orientalist publications. For the Arabs, Hedayat endeavored to *disinvest* them from the normative regalia of his Sasanian characters. The latter's "savage" garb reveals the dehumanizing effects of such disinvestiture.

Another characteristic of the Arabs was their assumed *culturelessness* (*bi-farhangi*). The elite activities the Persians cherished in *Parvin* appears to have no value for them. Therefore, playing music, leisurely painting and keeping pets – activities that embodied the Sasanian culture, according to Hedayat – were contrasted with the basic instincts the Arabs epitomized in the play. Portrayed as oversexed, the Arabs lusted after women (Parvin) while they were overcame by greed and deceitfulness. Additionally, vandalizing iconic elements of Persian culture defined their counter (Persian) culture activities. For example, when they enter Parvin's house for the first time, "one of them [the Arabs]

[343] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 17.

picks up a handwritten book and smashes it to the ground, trampling on it."[344] The other Arabs are also portrayed as looting the house while laughing with satisfaction![345] Senselessly destroying Iran's ancient monuments was supposedly another Arab trait.

In his other play, *Māziyār* (1933), Hedayat took these contrasts to their logical extreme by rearticulating them in a racial anthropological language. Like what he did in *Parvin*, the antiquarian imagery Hedayat constructed in *Māziyār* was extracted from the apparatus of historical scholarship. Focusing on certain events in the life of Māziyār, a Persian prince who revolted against the Abbasid Caliph in the ninth century, Hedayat dramatized the trauma of Arabs' supposed racial degeneration as it "polluted" the superior race of Persians following the conquest of Iran. In the play, Māziyār's fierce anti-Arab sentiments usually cohere around racial subjects. For example, when he understands that his Persian allies are forsaking him, he blames Arab miscegenation as the source of all evil: "These people's race (*nezhād*) has become corrupt (*fāsed*) after mixing with the Arabs. They're devoid of thoughts, spirit, talent and actions because of the filth of Arab mind (*kesāfat-e fekr-e ʿArab*)."[346] At another time, he scolded his brother's peace treaty with the Abbasids as something no Persian would do. Promising to exact vengeance against the Arabs, Māziyār blamed his brother's presumably "vulgar" spirit for his Arab

[344] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 38.

[345] The "dry" and "demonic" laughter of the looting Arabs may be heard in Hedayat's other works as well. The old man's "dry and repulsive laughter, a hybrid mocking laughter that made one's hair stand on end" in *The Blind Owl* (1936) is arguably an echo of the Arabs' laughter in *Parvin*. The ethereal girl's giving a lotus flower to the old man may be interpreted as Iran's bestowing her riches to Islam.

[346] Hedayat, *Māziyār*, 95-6.

lineage: "You're not an offspring of my father. You were bred by an Arab bondwoman (*kanīz*). Leave me alone, you despicable wretch (*gedāmanesh-e past*)!"[347]

According to Hedayat, Māziyār viewed his revolt against the Abbasid Caliph as an archetypal fight between Manichaean opposites. In this eternal fight, the Arabs' purported racial inferiority worked tirelessly to defile the presumed "purity" of the Persian blood. The threat of miscegenation, or sexual union between the Arabs and Persians, was believed to pose dire consequences for the pureblooded Persians (*Irāniān-e pāk nezhād*). It made the Aryan Persians to inherit purportedly inferior characteristics from the Semite Arabs; characteristics that were believed to be fundamentally foreign to the Persian blood. In his play, Hedayat turned these troubling ideas into a story that blamed the so-called Arab legacy (*mirās-e ʿArabān*), for polluting the assumed racial purity of the Persians. As Māziyār declared to a confidante, the betrayal of his friends was because of their racial impurity:

> There are many Persians like them. My brother is one of them. If one of their parents is an Arab, or their fathers had converted to Islam, it's enough to absorb all the knavery of Arab spirit (*rezālat-e akhāq-e ʿArab*).[348]

A source of inspiration for Hedayat was Mojtabā Minovi (1903-1977), the celebrated historian and scholar of Persian literature. The extensive research Minovi had done on the life and times of Māziyār prefaced Hedayat's play and took up close to 70 pages of the book. As we learn from this Introduction, Minovi entertained unabashedly racialist assumptions about the Arabs as occupying an inferior status compared with the Persians.

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[347] Hedayat, *Māziyār*, 112.

[348] Hedayat, *Māziyār*, 116.

Certain elements of Hedayat's plot and especially its dialogues tend to be inspired by Minovi's controversial assumptions. According to Minovi, Māziyār was unique among all Persian sovereigns since he harbored strongest antipathy toward the Arabs:

> Among the heroes and sovereigns who ruled Iran, the Kāren (Qāren) family resisted most against the Arabs. Their Persian upbringing and natural courage forbid them to be subjugated by a bunch of snake-eating demon-spawns (*moshti mār-khārān-e ahriman-nezhād*). And, even after associating with them, they refused to learn their language and manners.[349]

Deception was believed to be so ingrained in the Arabs' character that they turned it into a weapon against the Persians. As we learn from Minovi's Introduction, the Abbasid Caliph subdued Māziyār by dishonesty:

> But the Arabs who knew that fighting with him would be useless, as was their habit, tried to subdue him by deceit and espionage. Two or three generations had passed from the time of Vandād Hormozd until Māziyār. Because of mixing (*āmizesh*) with the Arabs, the blood of the people of Tabarestān had become corrupt, and the filthy Semites (*kesāfat-hā-ye sāmi*) were accepted among them.[350]

It must be noted that an important byproduct of drawing on the racialist discourse the Persian elite found in many European texts was reconceptualization of *nezhād* (originally meaning "genealogy" or "lineage" in Middle Persian) in order to stand for "race" (as a new standard for hierarchizing peoples and culture) which was a recently acquired concept. In medieval texts such as the *Shāhnāmeh* the word *nezhād* stood for the "genealogy" or "lineage" of a person.

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[349] Hedayat, *Māziyār*, 10. The concept of "race" entered Persian language in late nineteenth century after reconceptualization of *nezhād* which originally meant "progeny" in Persian. Modern Persian nationalism maximized the currency and acceptance of the new concept of "race" in Iran in 1920s and 1930s.

[350] Hedayat, *Māziyār*, 11.

As I mentioned above, a characteristic of the gang of oversexed Arabs was their lusting after women while their chief conspired to ravage Parvin as his symbolic prize after conquering Iran. The Arabs' ill-intentions and presumed sexual motives were reported onstage by scared Persians. Parvin's servant observed one of the Arabs in utter apprehension: "I saw one of them this morning who had wrapped himself in a cloak. He was hiding behind a tree and was staring at you (*points to Parvin*) when you were standing by the portico. The dog barked so he escaped by jumping the fences."[351] When the gang of Arabs see Parvin for the first time, one of them blinks and remarks: "Praises to Allah! I haven't seen such beauty in my life."[352] Then, later-on, we find him abducting Parvin in sleep. Her sick father begs the Arabs not to touch her daughter:

> *Chehreh-pardāz rises up with difficulty and grabs the dirty end of the Arab's cloak* – I swear you to your religion not to take away my daughter! Stop … Let me … Let me see her once again! (*The Arab frees his cloak. All four of them laugh a long and dry laughter. The wind shuts off the lights. Lightning flashes in the portico from time to time.*) Don't you have any kindness in your hearts? Let me … Let me …[353]

In the final scene of the play, Parvin stabs herself in order to protect her dignity from the Arab chief's advances. The human emotions (sadness and potential remorse) the Arab chief shows after finding Parvin's dead body tend to betray his one-dimensional characterization as a coarse and licentious warlord.[354] Though scarce, details such as

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[351] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 35.

[352] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 38.

[353] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 40.

[354] The stage directions before the curtain drops: "[the Arab chief] *solemnly brings the incense container and puts it by her dead body. Thick smoke fills the air. Far away, the trembling music of a harp may be heard as it plays a mournful song. The Arab chief covers Parvin's body with expensive*

these militate against the one-dimensional and essentialist representation of Arabs in Hedayat's play.

Hedayat routinely identified the Arabs in his play with certain animal and demonic tropes. For example, Parvin described the noises she heard outside (Arabs invading their neighborhood) as "the singing of demons and wild animals" (*āvāz-e divān u dadān*).[355] Her Her servant, Bahrām, took such tropings a step further by envisioning the Arabs as some sort of nocturnal animal: "their eyes glow like animals. They can see in the night. I'm afraid of them! They're like monkeys: dark, bulging eyes, dirty beard on their chins, shrill voices."[356] Parvin's father reiterated these tropes when he described the invading Arabs as "demons and wild animals [who] have broken chains."[357] Using the same logic, in another occasion, he pointed to the Sasanian drape (center piece of Act II) and allegorized it into a history of Arabs breaking away from Persian domination:

> *The old man stares at the hanging drape* – Look! The deer stands for Iranians … The young king that fought with lions and wild animals was overcame by them … These ferocious animals that were once suppressed are now attacking the deer … They've destroyed our lives … Oh, am I dreaming? Palaces, Ctesiphons [*sic*] and *Bahārestān*s fell in the hands of evil-natured Arabs (*tāziyān-e bad-nahād*).[358]

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fabrics and jewelry he takes from a treasure box. The music stops. The Arab covers his face and steps back." See Hedayat, *Parvin*, 55.

[355] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 36.

[356] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 37.

[357] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 30.

[358] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 33. *Bahārestān* refers to the jewel-studded Sasanian royal carpet known as "The spring of Khosrow" (*bahār-e kasrā*) or the "winter carpet" (*farsh-e zemestāni*). Based on what we may gather from medieval Arab historians, the abundance of jewelry used in this carpet created a virtual spring garden for the Sasanian kings so that they could carouse in it during the winter. The carpet was eventually cut up into pieces and divided among the victorious Arabs

Another trait going hand in hand with the trope of animalization relates to the Arabs' purportedly degenerate source of subsistence. Lizard as Arab food found multiple expressions in *Parvin* as a presumed marker of Arab inferiority. For example, echoing an argument derived from the passage quoted above, Parvin's father lamented that "desert-dwelling lizard-eating Arabs who for years were our inferiors, paying taxes to us" had found the upper hand over the Persians.[359] At another time, after making fun of the Arabs' religious conviction (believing that if killed they shall go to Paradise), Parvin's father claimed that the former had mistaken Iran with their promised Paradise since "they couldn't find anything other than lizards under Arabia's scorching sun."[360] Hedayat's preoccupation with Islamic vision of paradise goes deep in his *oeuvre*. As I shall argue in the coming sections, Hedayat's satirical works present the strongest attack he could muster against Islamic paradise.

Hedayat made a similar observation about the Muslim guardian of an exquisite shrine in Isfahan. In his opinion, the Persian art engraved on the dome of the shrine had made it into a Paradise on earth:

> There are so many beautiful designs on these tiles, and such mastery has gone into their making that instead of leading people to God and the other world, they plunge them into a series of pleasant reveries. It appears that the secret behind the longevity of the shrine's guardian – a white-bearded old man sitting beside a book and under the shades – was in seeing the extraordinary designs of these tiles

when they captured the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon in 637 AD. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica* s.v., "Bahār-e Kasrā."

[359] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 21.

[360] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 23.

> every day which must have uplifted his spirit. The Turquoise Palace (*qasr-e firūzeh*) promised to be in Paradise was his home.[361]

According to these arguments, the Arabs' humble source of subsistence disqualified them for claiming sovereignty over Iran. This argument relied on the sentiments Rostam Farrokhzād expressed in the *Shāhnāmeh* (quoted above). The Sasanian general delegitimized the Arabs' rule over Iran based on assumptions about their material culture such as uncouth appearance and humble source of subsistence. The two Arabic texts (Tabari and ibn Khaldūn) I discussed above featured similar reports about presumed degeneracy of (Bedouin) Arab material culture. Tabari's reports are very important since they show that at the highest official level, the Persian king entertained a condescending outlook toward Arab material culture as a way for delegitimizing the invading Arabs' claim for sovereignty over Iran.

But perhaps the most elaborate argument against the Arabs was uttered by Parvin's servant, Bahrām. Struggling to comprehend the reasons behind the invasion of his country, Bahrām blamed the Muslim Caliph, ʿOmar ibn Khattāb (*ca.* 581-644), for inspiring his army with an evil incentive:

> It is not their chief that is bloodthirsty. It's the Caliph who has ordered massacres and selling of women so that they've shown all sorts of injustice for destroying the Mazdean religion [Zoroastrianism]. They want to wreak havoc among us. It's as though a pack of bloodthirsty devils or demons have revolted against the Persians and want to uproot them. Right now our country is ruled by *Angra Mainyu* (the Satan) and the Demon of Wrath. Bloodshed and injustice can be found everywhere.[362]

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[361] Hedayat, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), 88.

[362] Hedayat, *Parvin*, 20.

The foregoing observations capitalize on the animalizing tropes I discussed above in Bahrām remarks about the Arabs. Portraying them as a menacing swarm ("pack") complemented his previous observations about their purportedly repulsive source of subsistence. The mindset underpinning these assumptions arguably derived from a sense of Persian ethnocentrism that arrogated an assumed superiority onto the speakers in the texts discussed above. Consuming lizards apparently deviated from the norms constituting the more advanced material culture these speakers assumed for themselves. What was new though was Hedayat's mobilizing a repertoire of apocalyptic texts that gave voice to the intense trauma the Zoroastrians felt after the conquest of Iran in the seventh century.

The Arabs we find in Hedayat's early plays (*Parvin* and *Māziyār*) tend to reappear in his other works as well. Similar to the uncouth (Bedouin) Arabs that invaded Iran on the stage of those two plays, the ones that live in the Arab lands (outside Iran) are also marked by an almost identical repertoire of characteristics. A few examples can help us understand these continuities better. For example, in a short story titled "Talab-e Āmorzesh" (Seeking Absolution, 1933) we follow a group of Iranians making a pilgrimage to a Shiʿi shrine in Karbala. The land identified by the narrator is *ʿArabestān* which either refers to the country known today as Saudi Arabia or any land inhabited by the Arabs.[363] This land is populated by some of the most desolate scenery and poverty-stricken inhabitants one could find in any story by Hedayat. With an obsessive attention to detail,

[363] In Persian, the compound *ʿArabestān* is formed by *ʿArab* + *estān* (land). Karbala desert in Iraq is a major Shiʿi pilgrimage site. The narrator does not specify if the pilgrims were making a hajj pilgrimage which would make Saudi Arabia the potential setting of the story.

the wandering gaze identified any blemishes it could find in the land or the people that inhabited:

> The nearby desert landscape was barren and greyish in color. Random dunes rippled along the road and continued as far as one could see. Miles would pass without a single palm tree changing the landscape. Anywhere a pool of pungent water was found, a family had was formed around it. The scorching wind made it hard to breathe. It was as though we had entered the gates of hell.[364]

In this post-apocalyptic setting, the humanity of the Arabs is systematically put under erasure. Identifying any *lack* or *absence* of normalcy, the narrator represented the Arab lands as the absolute opposite of Iran, which in many Persian texts is called "mark of paradise" (*minū-neshān*). In this hell on earth the Arab family living in an oasis is portrayed as filthy creatures infesting some rotten waters. Reaching a city on their way, the pilgrims are surrounded by "a formidable swarm" of Arabs begging for money and food. The imagery here is among the crudest representations we can find in Hedayat's *oeuvre*:

> Charlatan Arabs, [with] silly faces under fez caps, sly turbaned faces, hennaed beards and nails, and shaved heads, they played with their praying beads and walked in sandals, gowns and underwear [exposed?]. They spoke Persian, blurted some Turkish or uttered strong-accented Arabic that rambled in the air, coming as though from the bottom of their bowls. The Arab women with dirty tattooed faces and eyes outlined with heavy kohl had pierced their noses with a ring. One of them had put her black breast into the mouth of a dirty baby.[365]

These abject figures arguably were meant to provoke a calculated response in readers. The negative feelings invoked by this imagery was mobilized by Hedayat as these abject

[364] Hedayat, "Talab-e Āmorzesh" (Seeking Absolution), 155.

[365] Hedayat, "Talab-e Āmorzesh" (Seeking Absolution), 159.

figures and their related descriptions resurface in his stories with certain regularity. The regularity with which these *tableaux* resurface in these stories arguably speak of their presumed normalcy for him.

This presumed lack of normalcy, tends to over-determine every reference that is made to the people living in Arab lands. For example, while passing through the foregoing landscape, the narrator of the same story pauses the narrative to describe another Arab that is sprawling in front of a teashop. Exhibiting similar obsessions, narrator observes how the man is doing some of the most repulsive things the narrator had ever seen: with one hand the Arab was "picking his nose and with his other hand he was peeling off filth between his toes." And, as if this was not enough, the narrator continued by observing that the man's "face was covered with flies and [his body was] infested with lice."[366]

As I mentioned above, these repulsive images are conjured up by Persian observers as if they constitute a stable norm in the Arab lands. The casual manner they intrude into everyday lives of Persian characters speaks of their supposed normalcy. In another short story titled "Mohallel" (Legalizer, 1933), equally pejorative descriptions resurface in a casual conversation between two Persian friends. Asked about his wife's surviving "the evil Arabs" after making a pilgrimage to *ʿArabestān* (another unspecified Arab land), the husband has only harsh sentiments to share about that part of the world:

> Yes, among the naked Arabs (*ʿArab-hā-ye lokhti*) who are without language (*zabūn-nafahm*), these followers of Omar (*in Omari-hā*), barren desert, scorching sun![367]

[366] Hedayat, "Talab-e Āmorzesh" (Seeking Absolution), 159.

[367] Hedayat, "Mohallel" (Legalizer), 236.

One constant in these passages is the fact that the Arabs are almost always portrayed in a *vacuum*, as if they did not belong to any specific setting or larger narrative context. The narrators rarely embed the Arabs in any larger sociocultural setting that would perhaps confer some meaning or semblance of humanity on their existence. Hedayat's *ahistorical* Arabs are monolithic entities represented beyond any pale of (Persian) normalcy as abject and aberrant. *ʿArabestān* as a homogeneous habitat for all Arabs is another example of this essentialist tendency.

As I shall explain in the next section, a source of these stereotypical characterizations in Hedayat's fiction was his wish to dig up the history of the degeneracy he identifies around him in modern Iran.

Hedayat and "Scientific" Anthropology of Arabs

Behind these ghoulish images and apocalyptic landscapes there is arguably an ideology that appears to connect Hedayat's reception of archaeology (discussed above) to another scientific endeavor – *anthropology*. Hedayat mobilized the tropes and discourses of European anthropology in an effort to categorize the Arabs as inferior "others" for the Persians in the same way that generations of European writers had represented the Africans and the so-called "Orientals" as their inferior "others." The grotesque representations we found in the foregoing pages have numerous analogues in the so-called Orientalist literature, leaving us wonder if Hedayat consciously mobilized the discourse of "othering" we find in those texts.

In this section I shall argue that representation of Arabs in Hedayat present an intertextual palimpsest of old and new ideologies. These complex representations "modernized" age-old sentiments found in medieval texts such as the *Shāhnāmeh* by Ferdowsi or Nāser Khosrow's *Safarnāmeh*, among others, to conform to the ideology of European discourse of "othering" found in Orientalist literature. The repertoire of characteristics Hedayat associated with the Arabs was one byproduct of his appropriating this European discourse of "othering" as the essentialist and monolithic image of his Arabs tends to replicate the image of many "others" of European colonial literature. Another byproduct I shall investigate concerns Hedayat's representing his essentialized Arabs in contradistinction to his full-fledged Persian characters in his stories.

In the following pages I will try to show how Hedayat's reception of archaeology went hand in hand with the reception anthropology as he turned his anthropological gaze to the Arabs in order to hierarchize them as inferior "others." Either from the outside or the inside, as we learn from Hedayat, the actions and sentiments of Arabs tend to cohere around greed for gold, deceit and a predilection for abjectness. Such a characterization reduced the Arabs to a handful of gestures and emotions constituting the limited catalogue of features that throughout his career became constants when it came to representing them in his stories. Whether they are the Bedouin Arabs who invaded Iran to spread Islam or those who live in the Arab lands, the Arab "other" in Hedayat's stories reveal remarkable ideological consistency that may be described as anthropological in approach, and Eurocentric in orientation.

As a preamble to my discussion of anthropology of Arabs in Hedayat, I would like to return to his travelogue, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), one last time

since an observation he made there tends to reveal how his reception of archaeology resulted in his subscription into the philosophical underpinnings of Western archaeology. Understanding the degree Hedayat's subscription can help us investigate how he acquiesced to the Eurocentric and colonial underpinnings of the anthropological gaze I identify here. As I explained in the previous sections, Hedayat's travelogue followed an emergent tendency in modern Iran where Persian intellectuals tried to reclaim their country's ancient heritage through antiquarian expeditions to archaeological locations in Iran. The observation I refer to here concerns the sentiments Hedayat expressed for capturing the "enchanting and marvelous" beauty he discovered at the famous Shah Mosque in Isfahan. Using hyperboles to describe his excitement, Hedayat observed:

> There are so many beautiful designs on these tiles, and such mastery has gone into their making that instead of leading people to God and the other world, they plunge them in a series of pleasant reveries. It appears that the secret behind the longevity of the shrine's custodian – a white-bearded old man sitting beside a book in the shades – was in observing the extraordinary designs of these tiles every day which must have uplifted his spirit. The turquoise palace (*qasr-e firūzeh*) promised to be in Paradise was his home.[368]

No praise for Persian art and architecture would have been complete for Hedayat without pitting it against its presumed antithesis – Arab art and culture. Thus, the old clergy's belief in the Qurʿan was represented by Hedayat to underpin investment in ideals that were inferior to what Hedayat found in Isfahan! The old man's sitting in the shades beside his holy book gave Hedayat an opportunity to parody the vision of Paradise we found in the Islamic tradition. The rivers, trees and especially shades of trees found in

[368] Hedayat, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), 88.

descriptions of Heaven in the Qurʿan that, according to Hedayat, was inferior to what the old man found in Isfahan. The old clergy, in other words, discovered eternal life in the shades of Persian architecture well before achieving the ideals of Arab culture in the Qurʿanic paradise. By arguing that Persian art and architecture surpassed the material culture that underpin Islam's vision of Paradise, Hedayat let the former to humiliate Arabs' vision of ideal garden.[369]

Hedayat's admiration for Persian art and architecture was in part inspired by the writings of well-known Orientalists. As we saw above, he often cited the names of some of these Orientalists in footnotes to *Parvin*. One authority he mentions in his travelogue is the renowned critic and historian of Persian art, Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969). Well aware of Pope's contributions to globalizing the fame of Persian art and architecture (p. 80), Hedayat endeavored to echo the European critic's passionate praise for the transcendental quality of Persian art.[370] For example, in a 1928 publication, Pope celebrated the Persian discovery of arabesque as "the basis and starting point for a new chapter in the history of decorative art." Not shying away from elaborate pronouncements, he observed that the timeless quality of Persian art was "the real ambrosia, the food of the gods, soul-nourishing and itself immortal."[371] Echoing similar

[369] It is commonly accepted that the picture of Paradise in the Qurʿan is "tied to the material realities of the Hijaz region of Arabia." See Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, xvi. See also Lehrman, *Earthly Paradise*, 31-2, where he observes: "With little mention of flowers, this is a paradise based on the oasis of a desert people."

[370] For information on Pope's contributions in the field of Persian art criticism and history see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Arthur Upham Pope."

[371] Pope, "Persian Art and Culture," 516.

sentiments, Hedayat admired in his travelogue the exquisite beauty of Persian art in Isfahan by making Allah bow down to it! This is Hedayat's sarcastic conclusion: "Even though a mosque is the House of God but here God must request permission to enter since gods of industry (*khodā-vandegārān-e sanʿat*) have made this place."[372] Such observations, among many others, can help us understand the extent of Hedayat's appropriation of the authoritative pose of certain Orientalists, which helped him look back at his country through their lens.

In the passages I examined above, contrasting the Arab material culture with that of the Persians provided the epistemological grounds for Hedayat to characterize the former as inferior because of their uncouth appearance and humble mode of subsistence (eating lizard). Haunted by the Bedouin Arabs' physical features and lifestyle, Hedayat endeavored to represent them beyond the pale of normalcy – that is, beyond a Persian reality that operated as normative in his works. Claiming the knowledge and authority of an anthropologist, Hedayat applied the tools he found in European publications to categorize the Arabs' existence as aberrant (un-Persian).

A text that can help us examine the dynamics of Hedayat's anthropological gaze is *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon, posthumously published in 1979). The gaze I identify here enabled him to reduce the Arabs, and especially their Muslim culture, to an inventory of trivial objects and repulsive rituals. Doing so let him hierarchize them as belonging to an inferior civilizational status, in comparison with the Persians which constitute the normative standard for him. Hedayat's ethnocentrism arguably is

[372] Hedayat, "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān," 89.

influenced by the rampant Eurocentrism we find in his works as the representation of Arabs in this text shares great similarities with the Orientalist category of so-called "savages."

The Pearl Canon is without a doubt one of the most sophisticated attacks Hedayat mounted against the Arabs and Islam, the religion they brought to Iran. By knitting together a gallery of contemporary and historical voices, and incidents part real and part fictional, Hedayat created a satirical picture of Islam and Muslim culture that is still unparalleled for its anger and sarcasm. His ingenious flights of fantasy (playing with real characters and historical events in funny and surreal settings) and especially vast knowledge of history (Persian, Islamic and European) have greatly contributed to what has been described as his "gift for satire, mockery and lampooning."[373]

As we learn from Hedayat's recently published letters, writing *The Pearl Canon* was an emotionally drenching process for him that preoccupied his mind for a long time. This was partly because Hedayat used his manuscript draft for channeling out all the negativity he felt as a writer unsatisfied by the promises of modern life under Reza Shah in Iran. His anxieties about the growing presence of Islam and Islamic *sharia* in modern Persian society brought him to the conclusion that he must expose the presumed dishonesty of pious Muslims by discrediting their Islamic heritage. In a letter to his close friend and longtime associate, Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi (d. 1951), Hedayat promised a relentless and unforgiving exposé:

> I'm thinking about creating a funny and obscene thing that would be like a spit (*akh u tof*) in everybody's face. Maybe I won't be able to publish it which won't

[373] Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, 161.

matter! But it will be my final weapon (*harbeh*) so that they won't say: "he [Hedayat] was a real ass!"[374]

Ever since its publication, the fame of this hilarious and profane satire has grown exponentially. Its four editions published in the past twenty-five years speaks of its popularity among the scholarly community.[375] Its countless online editions and reproductions reveal an even wider circulation and popularity among ordinary readers.

Another reason behind the longevity of this notorious text appears to be the European tropes and discourses Hedayat utilized for constructing his attack against Arabs and Islam. By comparing the seventh-century Muslim conquest of Iran with the British colonization of India, Hedayat endeavored to portray the Arab Muslims who invaded Iran as vicious agents of a so-called "Islam Co Ltd" (an Islamic version of the infamous East India Company) engaged in exploiting the conquered Persians. In *The Pearl Canon*, Hedayat's harnessed an array of tropes and discourses he found in the Persianate literature – such as the animalizing trope of the "other" in Shiʿi *taʿziyeh* performances or ʿEshqi's anti-colonial discourse against Islam – to modernize them by recasting the Arabs as cold-blooded colonizers committing countless acts of cruelty against the Persians in the name of God and religious conversion.

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[374] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 109.

[375] In order of publication, the titles I have examined were edited by Bahrām Chūbineh (1982), Iraj Bashiri (1986), Shojāʿ ud-Din Shafā (2001) and Mohammad Jaʿfar Mahjūb (2008). The latter edition is based on a manuscript handwritten by Hedayat. It is also the only extensively annotated edition with annotations compiled by a well-known scholar and historian of Persian literature.

Hedayat generated tremendous dramatic irony in his satire by turning ancient Persia into al-Andalus, a medieval Muslim territory conquered by Arab Muslims in the seventh century CE. Although this identity swap is not explicitly acknowledged in the text, yet ample references tend to corroborate such intertextual relationship. The story starts in the year 1500 CE when the "Europeanized (*mostafrang*) and modern and authoritarian but not dictator" king of al-Andalus decided to throw "the Jāhiliyya Arabs and the Bedouin Arabs" out of his ancestral country.[376] A narrative aside recounts how al-Andalus became a safe haven for Berber and Moorish Arabs, exacting poll-tax on the indigenous Christian population "so that the light of piety would shine from their faces and the infidelity-land (*kofrestān*) of their hearts would turn into purity-land (*pākestan*)."[377] Parodying early Islamic historiography, the narrator cites multiple traditions, claiming that since the king of al-Andalus "had a talent for drinking and painting and music and watching *Carmen* and *The Barber of Seville* and sculpture and *istinja* (cleaning) with toilet paper" he was forced to forbid those Islamic rituals that limited his lifestyle. A list of these rituals included,

> Polygamy (*taʿddod-e zavajāt*), temporary marriage (*sigheh*), public lamentations (*rowzeh-khāni*), threnody (*marsiyeh*), public adulation (*maddāhi*), passion plays (*taʿziyeh*), public mourning (*nowheh-khāni*), panhandling (*takaddi*), submission (*taslīm*), satisfaction (*rezāʾ*), fasting and wailing (*rūzeh va zūzeh*), necrophilia (*mordeh-parasti*), precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyyeh*), marriage legalizer (*mohallel*), washing the dead in ritually pure water (*ghosl-e mayyet dar āb-e ravān*) and loosening of turban at praying (*estehbāb-e taht ul-hanak*).[378]

[376] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 24.

[377] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 24.

[378] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 25.

In passages such as the above, Hedayat subjected the Arabs to a quasi-anthropological gaze that reduced their culture and religion to a set of customs and actions, relating to the ritualistic aspects of Islam. According to him, these elements were foreign to the Persian culture – even though many of them were practiced by Muslims in Iran – and tend to downgrade it with aberrant and repulsive tendencies. Lists such as the above show up in *The Pearl Canon* routinely; so much so that quoting them in full would require several pages. On the next page, for example, we find the king entertaining another list of presumed Islamic attributes. Considering the contributions of Islam to his culture, the al-Andalus king sarcastically observes:

> Their religion is a *sikīm khiyārdi* [absurd hotchpotch[379]]: a sickening admixture of conflicting ideas, pilfered from previous religions and superstitions, mixed together without any proportion, in a hurried and unintelligent manner. It is the enemy of natural human talents. Its laws are against any progress among nations. It's been forced onto people with swords. In other words, it's all about blazing swords and panhandling: either you pay tax and poll-tax (*jaziyyeh*) or we cut your head! They've robbed us of all our money and jewelry, have destroyed our artworks and still ask for more! They have done the same thing everywhere they've stepped. We never buried our infant girls alive: several queens including Isabeldokht have ruled al-Andalus.[380]

As I mentioned above, the story of the Islamic conquest of al-Andalus in Hedayat's satire was used as an allegory of the Islamicization of ancient Persia. Certain details in the foregoing passage reveal the dynamics of this allegorization. For example, one of the criticisms directed at Islam here is its apparently infecting the al-Andalusians with the custom of burying their little girls alive despite the fact that in their pre-Islamic times

[379] *Sikīm khiyārdi* in Azeri literally means "my prick is a cucumber." I thank Dr. Hasan Javādi for the translation.

[380] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 26.

certain queens ruled their land. The name of the queen mentioned here is Isabel-dokht, which is a play on the name of a Sasanian queen named Būrān (r. 630-31) who is also known as Pūrān or Pūrāndokht.[381] She, along with her sister, Āzarmīgdokht (ruled for a few months in 630), are among the last Sasanian rulers before ancient Persia was subdued by Arab Muslim forces.[382]

By the end of his long-winded harangue (quoted partially above), the king convinces himself that, "[e]vidently, this religion is an enemy of humanity and good only for looters and colonizers (*ghārat-garān va esteʿmār-chiān*)."[383] Then, taking the Arabs unawares, he raids and scatters them. What the victorious king took home as spoils amounted to another list of objects commodifying Islam and the Arab culture:

> The enormous spoils he took from Arab civilization included: *lola-heng* (bathroom pitchers), *ʿArab dūgh* (Arabian yogurt drink), *kafiyeh-ʿeqāl* (Bedouin headdress) *vājebi* (depilatory), *naʿlein* (sandals), *ʿammāmeh* (turban) and *torbat-e ʿasl* (pure soil [of Karbala]).[384]

A technique Hedayat used for exposing what he considered as the evil effects of Islam and the Arab culture on the conquered peoples was to make well-known Arab rulers and/or military commanders confess their evil intentions in outbursts of honesty and

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[381] For information on Pūrāndokht see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Būrān."

[382] For information on Āzarmīgdokht see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Āzarmīg-dokht."

[383] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 28.

[384] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 29. The soil of Karbala where the third Shiʿi Imam, Hossein ibn ʿAli (625-680), was martyred is considered sacred by many Shiʿis. The healing effects of this soil (e.g., if consumed in small portions) is mentioned in some traditions. See *Dā'erat ul-Moāref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi* (The Great Encyclopedia of Islam) s.v., "Torbat." See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd Ed) s.v., "Turba" for other usages of the term.

Picture 9: A catalogue of Arab commodities –
illustration attributed to Hedayat (Katirā'ī 1970)

sincerity. Either divulging the so-called secrets of their trade in letters or to their confidantes, these characters were used by Hedayat as mouthpieces for shedding light on aspects of the Arabo-Islamic culture he disagreed with most. This is what happened when an Arab general named Tāriq ibn Soʿlūk decided to write "a fiery epic" for his defeated army on the impact of Arabo-Islamic culture on the newly converted nations.[385] Reassuring them that the far-reaching influences of Islam guarantees future victories, the Arab general prophesied how certain beliefs and rituals inspired by Arabo-Islamic culture could work to their advantage in the time to come. Some of the things he "disclosed" included:

> […] the godless infidels have kicked us out of al-Andalus with all due respect. Yet they don't know that all infidels have been enlightened with the religion of Islam, and guided to embrace poverty, ignorance, crying, necrophilia, submission and dissimulation. […] So much so that they started using their books to warm public baths, while depositing everything they had in Muslims' royal treasury (*beit ul-māl*), for pilgrimaging to holy shrines and Mecca, or as tribute (*bāj-e sebil*) or Imam's share.[386]

The trope of well-known Arabs or Muslims making public disclosures about their ill intentions is used extensively in Hedayat's satirical pieces such as *The Pearl Canon* and *A Muslim Delegation* (posthumously published in 1985). This trope may be found in works of other modern writers as well. Sadeq Chūbak's short stories "Pirāhan-e Zereshki" (The Purple Shirt, 1945) and "Cherāgh-e Ākhar" (The Last Lamp, 1965) were attempts at

[385] The real name of this general is Abdul Rahman al-Ghāfeqi (d. 732) who unsuccessfully challenged the forces of Charles Martel in October 732 CE in order to retake al-Andalus. According to the annotations, the name Hedayat gave to him (Soʿlūk) means "thief" or "highwayman" in Arabic. See Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 131.

[386] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 30.

highlighting the hypocrisy of "crook" Muslims. Chūbak's deceptive Muslims either admit to their ill intentions (wishing to embezzle others in the name of God and religion) or the narrators expose their tricks (by exposing them in public).

In the passage quoted above, Hedayat represents the Islamicization of al-Andalus as a sinister scheme for obtaining financial gain. The metaphysical aspects of Islam and/or the converted peoples' investment in a spiritual doctrine are glossed over here. In addition to this, the Arab general "confesses" that the impact of Islamic beliefs on the culture of the converted peoples guaranteed an upper hand for the Arabs in the future. According to Hedayat, Islam was the Arabs' tool for achieving this goal by penetrating the culture of the dominated peoples in an effort to secure personal advantages. Following this line of argument, aspects of Arab culture are said to infiltrate into the culture of indigenous peoples, fundamentally transforming their belief systems and even their lifestyles. Preoccupation with death and darker aspects of existence seem to be an aftermath of these transformations:

> […] joyous melodies transformed into wailing and agonizing lamentations; and [art of] stone-cutting into tombstone cutting; and painting into tile-making for mosques. Their gardens have been demolished; their cities vanquished – becoming a habitation of crows and ravens; their Christmas turned into *ʿeid-e ghorbān* [Muslim Festival of Sacrifice]; and their feasting and cheerfulness turned into mourning, wailing and crying.[387]

In the area of arts and humanities, the impact of Arab culture appears to be far more devastating. As the Arab general observed,

> Their books on science, literature and philosophy were burned to ashes and replaced with epistles on rites of defecation, ass-cleaning, intercourse with up-to-

[387] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 30.

> nine temporary wives, Islamic traditions and jurisprudence. Without a doubt, even if they manage to accomplish anything in the future, their science, arts, philosophy and literature would be known by everybody as Islamic civilization.[388]

Throughout *The Pearl Canon* Hedayat parodies early Islamic historiography by letting his characters base their villainous actions on junctures taken from the Qurʿan and the Old Testament. (Hedayat saw no difference between the two holy books and dismissed them for their Semitic origin.) From a thematic standpoint, the verses these characters cite appear to encourage the believers to take adverse actions against the infidels or advise the believers to be less hospitable toward those who disagreed with them. For example, the Arab general quoted in his epic some "fiery" passages from the Qurʿan – like, "O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them. Their ultimate abode is hell, a hapless journey's end." [9:73] – and also from the Old Testament – such as, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" [10:34] – so that he could arrive at the self-deprecating conclusion that:

> All Semite prophets and religious leaders, even those known for their peaceful and humanitarian actions, were demagogues and cutthroats (*howchi va chāghūkesh*). Therefore, our mission is to give rise to poverty, devastation and bloodshed.[389]

The closure of the Arab general's epic provoked another wave of anti-Arab satire. Disillusioned by their failure to retake al-Andalus, the Arab army decided to return to Arabia (*ʿArabestān*). This is how Hedayat interpreted their retreat:

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[388] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 30.

[389] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 31.

> […] although Eastern and Western civilizations were bent under a debt of lizard-eating Arabs' civilization, yet the Arab zealots did not wish to face indignity. Thus, they left behind their scientific, artistic, and philosophical benefits and their inventions for the Western nations and like the olden times, started donning *ʿabā* (Bedouin gown) without wearing anything underneath, roaming the desert lands of Arabia, reciting national stories and hunting for lizards.[390]

Worried about the Arabs regaining strength, the king recruited a navigator and explorer by the name of Christopher Columbus to help him stop them do so! The introduction of this European historical character marks an important aspect of Hedayat's satire, which involves his grafting European colonial history onto the Persianate tradition in order to substantiate his arguments about Islam being a colonial enterprise. Thus, in the surreal world of this satire, different histories and traditions come together to create moments where European colonial agents start echoing anti-Arab sentiments like those uttered by the Zoroastrian general, Rostam Farrokhzād, in the *Shāhnāmeh*.[391]

Columbus enters the story by making a pledge to the king of al-Andalus that he will "decimate the lizard-eating peoples; let mills run with their blood; and build skyscrapers with their skulls."[392] Columbus' promise echoes what certain Arab commanders are believed to have done after the conquest of Iran. Tabari's *Tārikh* records episodes where Arab commanders made an effort to run mills with the blood of Persian rebels.[393]

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[390] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 33.

[391] Echoes of Rostam Farrokhzād already may be heard especially when the king described the Arabs as "lizard-eating evil-natured" (*mūsh-khārān-e ahriman-nezhād*). He was reiterating a modified version of what the Zoroastrian general is believed to have said in the *Shāhnāmeh*.

[392] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 34.

[393] See annotations pages 128-29 for an example.

Hedayat modified the historical events of Columbus' voyages to include contacts with the Arabs so that he could lampoon their culture and religion through Columbus. In one of his voyages, to give an example, we read that Columbus mistakes Native Americans for Arabs thinking that their indigenous customs must be some kind of "logistical dishonesty" (*hoqqeh-bāzi-hā-ye sowq ul-jeishi*). Choosing to surrender, Columbus,

> […] grabbed a cross and a white flag, in addition to a few boxes of spoils he had taken from Arab civilization which included: *lola-heng* (bathroom pitchers), *naʿlein* (sandals), *chādor* (big veil), *chāqchūr* (women's pants), *ʿabā* (Bedouin gown), *chārqad-e qālebi* (headscarf), *rūbandeh* (face-mask), *mohr* (Shiʿi prayer clay), *tasbīh* (beads), *doʿā-ye nozleh-bandi* (anti-flue prayer), some leather containers of *ʿArab dūgh* (yogurt drink), some barrels of *vājebi* (depilatory), as well as canned mice and dried lizard […].[394]

Columbus' reports on his colonial exploits was another area where Hedayat continued the play of identities I mentioned above. For example, at one point Columbus claims that "For seven more days our world-burning army did nothing but killing, looting, burning and uprooting. A thousand time a thousand, and six hundred thousand unclean (*nāpāk*) Native Americans were martyred (*shahīd*) by our army" which recast his discovery of so-called "cannibals" through Islamic concepts such as martyrdom.[395] Revealing some of his evil plans for hurting the Arabs, Columbus send the following request to the king of al-Andalus:

> Please send a group of *siyāh-e barzangi* (African slaves[396]) as soon as possible for creating racial division, plus a dozen experienced priests, prison guards and torture experts. Also, send us any thieves, murderers, sweepers (*jārūkesh*),

[394] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 38.

[395] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 45.

[396] *Siyāh-e barzangi* has been described as "a very tall African, with long mustaches, ill-mannered, uneducated and prone to vulgar sexuality." See *Loghatnāmeh Dehkhodā* s.v., "Barzangi."

Picture 10: Hell “fire” – illustration attributed to Hedayat (Katirāʾī 1970)

> charlatans and adventurers that you've got so that we can eradicate the dear locals here. In the meantime, a race of natural-born killers shall be produced who with certain degree of honesty and truthfulness shall call themselves Jonny in the future. Mention must be made that at present I'm drawing a map of New Democratic Order (*nazm-e now-e demokrāsi*) for this land so that it may remain our protectorate (*dast-neshāndeh*) forever and ever.[397]

Columbus' prediction that "a race of natural-born killers shall be produced in the meantime" (*nezhādi jāni-ye bel-fetreh padid āyad andar miān*) is a play on one of the gloomiest prophesies of Rostam Farrokhzād in the *Shāhnāmeh*. Writing to his brother, the Zoroastrian general warned that the results of Arabs mingling with the Persians would be unfavorable. This is what we read in the *Shāhnāmeh*:

> Then Persians, Turks, and Arabs, side by side
> Will live together, mingled far and wide –
> The three will blur, as if they were the same;
> Their languages will be a trivial game.[398]
>
> *Az Iran u az Turk u az Tāziyān,*
> *nezhādi padid āyad andar miān;*
> *Nah dehqān, na Turk u nah Tāzi bovad,*
> *Sokhan-hā be kerdār-e bāzi bovad* (v.9/p.319).

By juxtaposing the two legacies, Hedayat endeavored to turn the Muslim conquerors into evil colonizers whose military expeditions were merely driven by their financial prospects. Rostam Farrokhzād's ominous predictions about Arabs entering Persian culture thus was interpreted as purportedly inferior people entering Iran, as Columbus'

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[397] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 47.

[398] Davis, *Shāhnāmeh: The Persian Book of Kings*, 836. The second couplet literally means: "Would neither be a Persian, neither a Turk, nor an Arab / Words would be uttered as a game [i.e., in triviality]." Warners' translation has it slightly differently: "A mongrel race – Iranian, Turkman, Arab – / Will come to be and talk in gibberish." See Warner, *Shāhnāma of Firdausī*, 76

detrimental racial policies specified. Devoid of any spiritual presumptions, Columbus' conquest was solely driven by exploitation of the natives so that up to the end of time they would willingly hand out their fortunes to the colonizers.

Another commonality Hedayat posited between Columbus and Muslim conquerors was the former's sanctifying his criminal activities by basing them on verses from the Qurʿan. Columbus' doing so may be read as a parody of a tradition in early Islamic historiography where the actions, motivations and especially the victories of Muslim conquerors where routinely based on what the writers of those texts discovered in the Qurʿan. The dramatic irony Hedayat created at these moments in his satire resulted from Columbus' apparent ignorance that his actions and motivations could raise serious ethical questions or even may be interpreted as inherently criminal, especially by those who do not subscribe to an Islamic outlook. One glaring example of this may be found when Columbus attempted to justify his massacre of Native Americans. Calling them "cannibal infidels" (*bi-dīnān-e ādam-khār*), he first cited a verse from the Qurʿan to then base his actions on the will of God:

> Then, according to the holy verse: "if they turn back (to enmity) then take them and kill them wherever ye find them, and choose no friend nor helper from among them" [4:89] he issued an order so that all the natives may first be tortured and then decimated. And their belongings may be looted in the name of Humanity, Freedom, Spreading Civilization, Social and Religious Justice, and Old and New

> Democracy. Their progeny had to toil and sweat[399] day and night in order to hand out their fortunes to his Highness Captain Columbus.[400]

In a similar manner, Columbus sanctified the inhumane punishments he inflicted on the Native Americans by basing them on verses of the Qurʿan. For example, "he ordered their chief to be skinned so that his skin may be stretched on a *donbak* (Persian drum). His flesh and bones were thoroughly cooked in a pot and thrown at bald vultures."[401] These grotesque justifications had terrible implications for the representation of Muslims conquerors whom are portrayed by Hedayat as nothing but bloodthirsty executioners driven by utterly non-spiritual incentives. In the newly conquered lands, converting the natives was thus associated with various violent customs such as animal cruelty; customs believed to be of Arab origin. Therefore, fights between camels and bulls (believed to be sacred animals for the Arabs) started to be organized in public in newly conquered lands, ending in the camels being brutally slaughtered with a mace. This episode was described by Hedayat by the authentic Arabic verb *nahr* ("to slaughter") in order to reveal its Arab origin. As the narrator tells us, such violent customs became popular since their

[399] I have translated *az kadd-e yasār va ʿaraq-e zahār* as "toil and sweat." Hedayat playfully altered the expression *az kadd-e yamin va ʿaraq-e jabin* which means toiling and making an effort to accomplish something. By changing "sweat of forehead" to "sweat of pubic area" he gave implications about the sexual misfortunes the Native Americans had to suffer under Columbus' tyranny.

[400] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 48.

[401] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 48.

propagators (al-Andalus Muslims) "had inherited cruelty and wickedness from the Arabs."[402]

Reminiscent of the travel diaries of the historical Columbus, Hedayat's Columbus left behind accounts of visiting bizarre people and exotic places. One such story involved a giant snake swallowing Columbus and his ship. Once inside its belly, Columbus noticed that "a warrior jumped out of a derelict mosque" rushing to kill them![403] Another account described the exquisite beauty Columbus discovered at the Island of Hormoz in the Persian Gulf. Forming an important aspect of his rhetorical war against the Arabs, Iran-as-paradise-for-Arabs appears to be a trope Hedayat constantly mobilized in order to deride the vision of heaven he found in the Qurʿan. This was because he believed that this vision was predicated on Arab material culture which to him was surpassed by Iran's beautiful landscapes and idyllic gardens. In one of his harangues against Islam, the king in *The Pearl Canon* added to this trope by mocking "diehard Muslims" for undergoing a life of misery and hardship in order to be rewarded with "imaginary sexual pleasures and gluttony" in the other world.[404] Using Qurʿanic paradisiacal imagery for describing idyllic scenery in Iran and turning the latter into a living embodiment of that book's ideal garden was another method for fighting against the Arabo-Islamic culture. As I explained above, one of the earliest traces of this topic may be found in Hedayat's travelogue "Isfahan Nesf-e Jahān" (Isfahan, Half of the World), where he describes the beauty of

[402] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 49.

[403] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 59.

[404] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 27.

Shah Mosque in Isfahan at the expense of the old clergyman enjoying the summer cool under the shades of mosque building (p. 88).

A similar move may be found in *The Pearl Canon* where the heaven is said to envy the beauty of the island of Hormoz in the Persian Gulf. Playing on the literal meanings of poetic clichés such as *rashk-e khold-e barīn* (lit. "envied by the highest garden" [i.e., Paradise]), Hedayat let the idyllic scenery of this island to be adorned with flora and fauna of extraordinary beauty. Literalizing another poetic cliché, Hedayat turned the island into a veritable Paradise claiming some of the iconic elements mentioned in the Qurʿan: "Three rivers flow in it: one of wine, one of milk and one of honey."[405] The beautiful girls living in this heaven on earth appear to come from the Qurʿan as well. As we learn from the annotations, the island's "ruby-faced cupbearers" (*sāqiyān-e zohreh-jabin*) represent the attendant houris or the "immortal youth" serving the faithful in the heaven.[406] This topic tends to resurface in Hedayat's *oeuvre* quite frequently especially when he wished to corroborate his arguments about Persian superiority (ethnocentrism) by relegating Qurʿan's vision of ideal garden to what he found in Iran. As I shall explain by the end of this chapter, Hedayat's parading a Muslims in a human zoo in Berlin can be

[405] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 61. Compare with the Qurʿan where we read: "A similitude of the Garden which those who keep their duty (to Allah) are promised: Therein are rivers of water unpolluted, and rivers of milk whereof the flavor changed not, and rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers, and rivers of clear-run honey" (47:15).

[406] The Qurʿan reads: "And (there are) fair ones with wide, lovely eyes. Like unto hidden pearls. Reward for what they used to do" (56:22-4).

understood as a grotesque culmination of this ideological strand in Hedayat's philosophical outlook.

Next, we read about the Portuguese's plans for recapturing the Pearl Canon which leads to recruiting a spy by the name of Āzar Jostaf ibn Bivarolāgh. As we learn from the annotations, the name of this individual is an Arabicized version of *Āzargoshasb* (a common pre-Islamic name) plus Bivarolāgh which consists of *bivar* (ten thousand) + *olāgh* (donkey).[407] A complex network of intertextuality appears to connect Āzar Jostaf to certain Arab figures. For example, his father's name (Bivarolāgh) tends to include a reference to Zahhāk, an evil character in Persian mythology who is believed to be of Arab origin. Zahhāk's title in the *Shāhnāmeh* is *bivarasb* which means "he who owns ten thousand horses" (*bivar* [ten thousand] + *asb* [horse]).[408] Furthermore, Hormisdas, the name of Āzar Jostaf's father, tends to partially echo Merdas, the name of Zahhāk's father. Hedayat turned the name of Āzar Jostaf's father into a comical variation of the mythological figure so that he could project all sorts of evil onto the Arabs by associating them with European colonial agents.

Āzar Jostaf is identified in the text as a "progeny of Hormisdas – a Pope of Iranian decent – who spoke Persian as fluently as Salman the Arab (*Salmān-e tāzi*)," in addition to showing some talent for poetry as well as "religious tortures, anathemas (*takfīr*) and

[407] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 158.

[408] For the history of the changes of the meaning of Zahhāk's name in the *Shāh-nāmeh* vs. the *Avesta* see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Zahhāk."

inquisition."[409] Dressed as a Christian priest, the spy takes the Persians by surprise when he made a claim that,

> Jesus put him on a mission to rescue this island's inhabitants from the harms of *lola-heng* (bathroom pitcher) which at the time they called *rīgh-afzār* (lit. "shit-tool"); and also from *taʿziyeh* (passion plays), crying, circumcision, *hijab*, *mordeh-parasti* (necrophilia), *takaddi* (panhandling), *ākhond-bāzi* (religious chicanery), *qorbāni* (sacrificial offering), and special attention to *qobol va dobor* (loin and rump) and *kesāfat-kāri* (sleazy activities).[410]

As the foregoing list (as well as those quoted above) tend to show, Hedayat commodified Islam in the form of trivial objects and abject activities in order to represent it as a repulsive system of belief – objects and activities that give life to aspects of Persian (Islamic) culture as well. Stripped of its spiritual and/or metaphysical import, Islam in Hedayat's satire was reduced to mere rules relating to sex, defecation and death. One constant in Hedayat's representation of Arabo-Islamic culture is his viewing their rituals and actions from the perspective of a disbelieving outsider. The apparent Eurocentrism of this outlook is reminiscent of his touring the Persian antiquities like a Westerner in his travel narrative (discussed in the Introduction).

The first anti-Islamic thing Āzar Jostaf does is to "[distribute] substantial amounts of free high quality toilet paper (*kāghaz-e estenjāi*) among the inhabitants [of the island of Hormuz] so that they would give up the heinous custom of washing their asses with sea water, and thus inflicting a deadly blow to the holy religion from behind."[411] Leaving no stone unturned in his caricature of Islam, Hedayat made the inhabitants of the island to

[409] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 77-8.

[410] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 78.

[411] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 78.

reject Āzar Jostaf's "un-Islamic" conspiracy by indicating that they would rather use the toilet papers "for copying their holy book."[412]

In another section, al-Būqaraqdokht, the imaginary daughter of Afonso de Albuquerque (1453-1515), the renowned Portuguese conqueror and colonizer, speaks up about how she (or his father) made plans for colonizing the Island of Hormuz. Donning an Arabic-sounding name, al-Būqaraqdokht's self-revelatory discourse on Portuguese's colonial strategies run for half a dozen pages in *The Pearl Canon* and is replete with veiled references to Islam and Arab conquest of Iran. For example, in order to outclass Āzar Jostaf who had used Christianity to exploit the native, Albuquerque's imaginary daughter claims that,

> Years of bitter experience taught us that the people of this world are credulous, stupid and servile; they believe whatever they see; and that this world is in utter disarray (*khar tū khar ast*). It's not our fault if we're taking advantage of people's stupidity. They deserve what they're getting! […] We won't waste a minute and shall keep them busy with absurd stories (*qesseh-ye bibi gūzak*). We shall encourage them to promote mercy, poverty, Sufism, necrophilia, crying, opium smoking and servility so that they would give up everything and say: "a hand from the Hidden Word should come out to help us"! But this hand shall be our hand. We shall teach them to forget about this world while we hoard gold and treasures for ourselves.[413]

The list of rituals and activities Hedayat associated with Islam (in the excerpts quoted in the previous pages) shows up here again, eliminating any differences between Portuguese colonizers and Arab Muslim conquerors. The expansionist policies of the Portuguese colonizer equated the exploitative strategies of Muslim conquerors as they

[412] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 79.

[413] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 90-1.

(both) exploit religion for their own personal advantage.[414] Taking her criticism to the next level, al-Būqaraqdokht decried historians for mystifying the cruel and unethical action she explained in above. Engaging in a profound discourse, al-Būqaraqdokht continued:

> Let me tell you that History always manifests itself through the irrefutable logic of a mace, a bloody dagger, a canon or an atomic bomb. As the Prophet said "I am messenger with a sword." Then a few rabbles are needed to start bragging and beating their chests in the name of God. Representing themselves as protectors of the law, they shall start deceiving people with fears of Hell and hopes of Paradise. This faceless mob that is slave to its basic needs and carnal desires shall follow them blindly, walking to the slaughterhouse with their own feet. This is how History changes.[415]

According to Hedayat, historians manipulating history in order to secure them own benefits was the root cause of humanity's problems. As he argued through al-Būqaraqdokht, the historians conceal the ugly truth about certain dictators by wrapping that truth in an aura of holiness (*olūhiyyat*) to "cover up [their] crimes and follies." "Historical incidents," she darkly observed, "are a catastrophe or a novel that are based on the requirements of time and according to personal taste every historian interprets differently."[416] After several paragraphs of vengeful attack against Islam, Christianity and religion in general, al-Būqaraqdokht came to the conclusion that religion was "an excuse

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[414] The last line of the quoted passage echoes a phrase Saʿdi of Shiraz, reiterating this topic by accusing the clergy of dishonesty when, "They teach others to forget about this world / while themselves hoard treasures" (*sīm u ghalleh*). For an anthology of anti-clerical literature in Persian see Shafā, *Dar Peikār-e Ahriman* (Fighting the Devil) which collects large array of literary examples in which the abuse of religion or *dokkān-e dīn* (lit. "religion shop") is criticized.

[415] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 92.

[416] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 92.

and a tool in the hands of a pack of wolves dressed as lambs who only sow seeds of discord and vengeance."[417] Comparing the Portuguese's capitalist strategies with the actions of certain religious propagandists, al-Būqaraqdokht again confessed:

> Let me tell you that since you're a wretched and backward people, you must donate the fruits of your efforts in this world and the next to the treasury of infidels (*beit ul-māl-e kofr*). And based on the seven-year program we have planned, we shall build prisons with new systems, military roads and airports for you. Foreign banks shall control your money, and your [financial] system shall be controlled by us. Additionally, to let you join the circle of modern nations, you have to borrow substantial amounts of money from us so that we could sell you our old and crappy weapons and armories, keeping you indebted to us up to the end of time.[418]

In the final pages of *The Pearl Canon*, the intertextual network connecting European colonialism to Islamic conquests becomes more explicit. Al-Būqaraqdokht's admission that she intended to "strengthen Islamic rites (*shaʿāʾer-e eslāmi*) as part of my colonial policy (*siyāsat-e esteʿmāri*)" may be considered a key moment in this regard.[419] Renaming herself as Khoshqadambāji, the imaginary daughter of Portuguese colonizer, Afonso de Albuquerque, converts to Islam along with a hundred thousand of her followers. Mistaking her syphilis sores as "as a miracle, the newly converted Muslims kissed and licked those sores as if they were her seal of prophethood (*mohr-e nabovvat*)."[420]

The satirical and irreverent tone of the previous sentence perfectly captures the morbid reality Hedayat predicted for Iran when Khoshqa-dambāji brought Islam to India

[417] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 92.

[418] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 94.

[419] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 92.

[420] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 102.

which allegorically represents Iran in *The Pearl Canon*. Taking with her the objects and customs Hedayat usually associates with Islam (discussed above), Khoshqadambāji endeavored to turn her native Indian culture into an opposite of what it used to be. The first step for doing so was to replace Latin alphabet (European script) with Arabic alphabet so that "epistles on defecation and Islamic jurisprudence" may be written in it! The novelties she introduced were great and controversial:

> She also ordered all dance clubs to be shot down, paintings to be torn, statutes to be smashed, musical instruments to be burned, and books to be thrown in fire. She ordered palaces and mansions, public gardens and pubs, universities and fire temples, as well as those lingam temples and churches that did not pay poll-tax (*jaziyyeh*) to be demolished. In their place, she ordered mosques, *tekyeh*s, shrines, minarets, pillories, and hangouts for smoking opium and making depilatory to be built. Experts in the fields of *azān* (call to prayer) and everyday prayers, along with roughneck mullahs, turned life into hell for the people. Their shrill and rumbling Arabic on the radio, invited people to foster necrophilia, fasting, forgetting this world, crying, and washing themselves in ritually pure water. […] Then in the name of national music, they started a barrage of bellows – like camels in heat (*mesl-e shotor-e fahl*) – promising people wanton and gluttonous rewards in Paradise.[421]

At the back of this imagery, we can sense Hedayat's anxiety about Islam attaining hegemonic authority in modern Iran. According to him, a delirious interpretation of Islam came to ascendency in Islamic India ushering a series of catastrophic changes. These changes were so excessive and exotic that often stripped their purveyors from any vestiges of culture and civilization. Likening the fervor of certain religious broadcasts to some sort of bestial mating ritual may be read as a continuation of the trope of animalization I have been investigating in the present dissertation. In passages like the

[421] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 105.

above, Hedayat reduced Islam to its originary Arab culture and then to the camels as a metonym for that culture.

Noticing that introduction of Islam in India provided the grounds for "deceiving people," Khoshqadambāji ordered puppies to be grown across the country (renamed Khoshqadamābād) so that people may smoke it to forget pains of hunger and starvation. The practice had the full support of the religious system so it was promoted publically from the minarets, producing widespread sociocultural change. As it may be expected, this gave Hedayat another opportunity to concoct yet another list of customs and manners that to him characterized these aberrant effects. Part of his list reads:

> Anyways, substantial demand was created for prayer-compilers, demon-fighters and marriage legalizers. Experts in public mourning and crying promised everybody that people shall enjoy all pleasures in the next world, forcing them to weep, fast, cry and moan while they themselves hoarded money and wealth. They used to say: "crying is like a medicine to all incurable pains!" […] The only creature loved was louse which was renamed "Ms. Manizheh." Those who didn't have it were not considered [true] Muslims. For the Ghorbān festival, they sacrificed a sheep for every louse they killed.[422]

Certain professions and guilds thrived under the monopoly of Islamic faith, plunging the people of Khoshqadamābād in the "quagmire" of religion and superstition. Hedayat captures the aftermath of this unfortunate state of affairs in the final list we find in *The Pear Canon*:

> To make a long story short, they regurgitated Islamic minutia with such authentic dialect (*ʿanʿanāt*) that Khoshqadamābād became like the desert of Karbala: so much crying, wailing, public mourning, chest beating, animal sacrifice and mourning and howling was performed that the whole world started to shake, making filth run above the heads of people. People's existence was under

[422] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 106.

> attacked by the loins (*pāʾin taneh*) of a flock al-Būqaraq III descendants and a gang of roughneck mullahs.[423]

Based on what we learn from Hedayat's letters, topics such Islamic radio broadcasts and increasing authority of Shiʿi clergy and Islamic *sharia* in modern Iran preoccupied his mind profoundly. In a letter dated July 25, 1948, for example, he complained that "state radio has recruited an Arab *muezzin* (reciter of call to prayer). All day long our Jewish [*sic*] neighbor leaves his radio on so that he and his kids could benefit from the reciter's delicate singing. This has added to my pleasures [of living in Iran]."[424] As we learn from his other letters, it was as though the *muezzin* followed him everywhere he went! Uttering a similar complaint, in another letter dated August 5, 1948 Hedayat reported to his friend that, "We miss you here! We've gradually started to develop our own religious music. Regrettably, a few days ago I was stuck in a bus so had to listen to a piece of *azān* (call to prayer) where a terrible-sounding mullah recited verses from the Qurʿan in the style of Abū Atāʾ."[425] It is striking how Hedayat failed to understand that *azān* (call to prayer) is different from the Qurʿan. A year later, in a letter dated July 29, 1949, we still

[423] Hedayat, *Tūp-e Morvāri* (The Pearl Canon) ed. Mahjūb, 107.

[424] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 144. Arabs and Jews are used interchangeably in Hedayat's stories since according to him both belong to the Semite race.

[425] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 145. Abū Atāʾ is a somber and melancholic style of classical Persian singing.

find him suffering from what he describes as the "howling and braying" (*zūzeh u ʿarr*) of certain Islamic broadcasts.[426]

It appears that Hedayat sincerely believed that increasing presence of Islam in Iran threatened to turn Iranians into Arabs! The growing presence of Islamic *sharia* posed the greatest danger to him. Writing sarcastically about recent developments in modern Iran, he told Shahid-Nūrāʾi that it was as though he was living his worst nightmares in his country since,

> This year they have taken it to the next level! Mr. Hazhīr [the Prime Minister] has issued a statement that has gone beyond this rascal mullah Kāshi. People shall get lashes if they drink alcohol (in holy cities). Anybody breaking fast in public shall be fined and imprisoned. All coffee-shops and restaurants have also been closed. So much so about our daily progress! I think we need to put on *kafiyyeh ʿaqāl* (Arab head dress) and wear *ʿabā* (Bedouin gown) and start following lizards and wild mice. This is an answer to those modern young educated politicians who say we won't see a regression (*qahqarāʾ*), and that we're making a transition. They say Iranians are wise! Nothing is more ridiculous that Iranian wisdom. Their wisdom has slid up their asses![427]

The Islamic "regression" Hedayat identified in modern Iran preoccupied him so much that he decided to make it the topic of his last published work, *al-Beʿsat al-Islāmiyah fi Belād al-Afranjiyyah* (A Muslim Delegation in the European Lands, posthumously published in 1985; henceforth *A Muslim Delegation*). Banned inside Iran, this controversial work has been printed outside of Iran for a number of time. The first edition apparently belongs to Bahrām Chūbineh (1982) followed by a US edition (1985) and Shojāʿ ud-Din

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[426] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 180.

[427] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 137.

Shafā's 2001 edition. A facsimilia of Hedayat's handwritten manuscript has been published as well (undated).[428] This viciously satirical work in part may be considered a rehash of *The Pearl Canon* as it reiterates some of the content Hedayat used in the latter work (discussed above). The relentless and ferocious representations we find in *A Muslim Delegation* arguably have made it into a freak child of the Persianate literature as its anti-Arab sentiments are unparalleled even compared with the worst moments in writers such as Mirzādeh ʿEshqi.

The "anthropological" gaze I tried to describe in the previous section arguably came to a culmination in the spectacle of animalized Arabs we find in *A Muslim Delegation*. In this work, the spectacularization of Arabs reached an unprecedented and grotesque level when Hedayat paraded an Arab Muslim delegation in a "human zoo" (ethnological exhibition) in Berlin. I will argue that Hedayat's banishing the Arab Muslims to the category of "savages," and parading them side-by-side animals in a zoo, was in line with the ideology of European colonialism that viewed its African "others" as subhuman monstrosities.

Despite the fact that this topic has received little critical attention so far, yet some useful information may be found in Hedayat's recently published letters. On October 17, 1946, Hedayat asked Shahid-Nūrāʾi to send him some information about Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man) in Paris:

[428] For a chronology of publications, see Bahārlū, *Nāmeh-hā-ye Sadeq Hedayat* (Letters of Sadeq Hedayat), 55.

> By the way, I don't know if you've ever visited Musée de l'Homme in Paris? If anything has been published about it or it has a publication, please send me a copy.[429]

In a letter written two years later (August 5, 1948) Hedayat repeated his request saying that knowledge about Musée de l'Homme "would be very beneficial," presumably for completing the draft of *A Muslim Delegation* he was working on during this time.[430] Unfortunately, what information Shahid-Nūrāʾi communicated to Hedayat in not known to us since recent publications focus mostly on Hedayat's letters and fail to account for the information that was transmitted to him through his friends and associates. But as I shall demonstrate, internal evidence in *A Muslim Delegation* tend to point to the fact that Hedayat was aware of the tenets of biological racism which promoted ranking human races based on their biology. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Musée de l'Homme in Paris was an institution devoted to this practice.

Hedayat's satirical work describes the travails of a group of Arabs Muslims who travel to Europe to disseminate the message of Islam. Three reports or "epistles" (*maktūbāt*) capture the work's three movements which outline the Arab Muslims' *congregating* (setting agenda), *traveling* (rite de passage) and *confessing* (failed plans). These three "epistles" purport to be compiled in Arabic by al-Jerjīs Yāfeth ibn Eshāq al-Yasūʿi, a reporter covering the Islamic mission for a journal called *al-Manjelāb al-Sudan* (lit. "The

[429] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 71.

[430] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 145.

Sewage of Sudan"). The reporter's Christian name may partially be translated as "Isaac the Jesuit."[431]

Step by step, the three "epistles" lampoon the Arab Muslims by recording every inappropriate decision or misstep they make along the way from the time they start making plans for the trip up to the end when they confess to their failed Islamic mission. The Eurocentrism I identified at the core of Hedayat's arguments against Arabs and Islam in *The Pearl Canon* tend to inform every aspect of his last satirical work as well. As I shall explain, the Arab Muslims are routinely contrasted to the Europeans whose deeds and creeds ontologically constitute the normative reality in the world of the story. Similar to *The Pearl Canon*, Hedayat mocked the Arab Muslims by letting them diverge from a central European norm which generated the comical energy Hedayat needed for his extended use of dramatic irony as a satirical technique.

As I said above, internal evidence in *A Muslim Delegation* can help us have a better understanding of the ideological tendencies Hedayat was potentially exposed to during the time he was composing this work. An important work of the Constitutional Era may be considered as an originary text for the anti-Arab polemics Hedayat deployed in *A Muslim Delegation*. The text I am referring to is *Seh Maktūb* (Three Epistles, manuscript published in 2005) by the pioneering Persian intellectual, Mirza Āqā Khan Kermāni (1854-1897). The unabashed hatred and indignation we find in Kermāni's work against the Arabs has turned his work into a pillar of anti-Arab representation in the Persianate tradition. It is outside the scope of the present chapter, but Kermāni's work is a redaction

[431] Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The life and Literature of an Iranian Writer*, 87.

(with expansions) of what he found in *Maktūbāt* (Epistles, manuscript published in 1985) by another pioneering intellectual, Mirzā Fath ʿAli Ākhondzādeh (1812-1878).

Although every single page of Kermāni's work is filled with prejudice against Arabs, two passages tend to stand out since they pose interesting parallels with what we find in Hedayat's satirical work. The first one comes about in a section delineating the "temperaments" (*kholqiyyāt*) Kermāni associated with the Bedouin Arabs who invaded ancient Iran in the seventh century. Here, we find a list of evidence Kermāni could gather for vilifying the Arabs as "barbarians" (*bārbār*) knowing nothing but engaging in cruel and criminal activities. Representing them as antithetical to the Persians, the Arabs to him were the harbingers of doom and destruction in a world that was dominated by peace and prosperity. An example he uses for establishing this point is arguably where parallels with Hedayat's work start showing themselves. For Kermāni, a Balūch in Paris was the perfect example of clash of civilizations:

> It is like housing ten desert-dwelling black Balūchs who live in tents, along with sixty camels, four hundred sheep, two shepherd dogs, twenty mules with long manes, ten leather water bottles, and eighty leather bags, plus other paraphernalia, in a royal palace or a hotel in Paris and give the Champs-Elysées avenue to them as fiefdom (*toyūl*). Obviously, in a matter of ten days they will destroy that palace and hotel, garden and avenue. The damage they shall cause will amount to ten million (*korūr*) tomans, and four thousand people will be helplessly wondering what to do with them.[432]

According to Kermāni, the moral of the story of a Balūch traveling to Paris was as simple as the following:

> The example of Arabs (*tāziyān*) bringing their spirit and habits into Iran, the mark of paradise (*minū-neshān*) was exactly like the example of that Balūch going to

[432] Kermāni, *Sad Khetābeh* (One Hundred Lectures) ed. Bahrām Chūbineh, 133.

> Paris. Since neither the latter are more ill-mannered than the Arabs, nor was the capital [of ancient Iran] in its time more ruined than France's capital.[433]

The incongruity Kermāni perceived between a desert-dwelling Balūch and an uptown location in a European city like Paris went beyond superficial differences implied by uncouth Balūch in an uptown location in Paris. The root cause of all evil to Kermāni was the archaic traditions constituting the religion of Islam that had afflicted the poor Balūch. In another passage Kermāni deals with this topic by discussing the ills of imprisoning women behind *hijab* and inside harems. He complained why women who "comprise half of Iran's population" should be "enclosed and forgotten in houses that look like graves."[434] Next, Kermāni satirized the biased Muslims whose fanaticism had brought about such atrocities in Iran. It is here that we can find the other passage that could have inspired Hedayat for constructing the imagery we find in *A Muslim Delegation*. Here, we find Kermāni sending a group of pious Muslims to London in order to explore their alterity from a strictly Eurocentric point of view:

> After requesting coffee, a pious Muslim was saying his prayers in a hotel in London. Brining in the coffee, the waiter notices that the respected guest in behaving oddly – sometimes bending and sometimes standing; sometimes putting his head to the ground and sometimes his ass in the air; and at other times raises his hands. In great surprise he comes close and in two-three languages asks about the frenzy and agitation afflicting the pious Muslim. Since the latter was at the middle of his prayer he does not respond. So the poor waiter desperately leaves the room and reports everything to the manager. Acting responsibly, the manager takes the hotel doctor to the room of the pious Muslim. They find him genuflecting. The doctor says that the man is suffering from madness (*jonūn*) and have been brought here for treatment. The madhouse is informed so its people come to take the pious Muslim. Finally, after lots of fighting and questioning, the pious Muslim

[433] Kermāni, *Sad Khetābeh* (One Hundred Lectures) ed. Bahrām Chūbineh, 133.

[434] Kermāni, *Sad Khetābeh* (One Hundred Lectures) ed. Bahrām Chūbineh, 170.

> promises the manager not to continue performing these lunatic actions (*raftār-e jonūn-kerdār*).[435]

Like before, Kermāni pronounces the moral of the story in unambiguous terms: "It is obvious that the habits of any race, especially those that are wild (*vahshi*), is not only subject to criticism, but also a matter of wonder and admonition (*heirat va ʿebrat*)."[436] As I shall explain in the following pages, these two passages can help us have a better understanding of the ideological legacy Hedayat ostensibly mobilized when he tried to throw light on the roots of the sociopolitical maladies he observed around him in modern Iran.

On the first page of *A Muslim Delegation*, the reporter tells us about his task as witness and compiler of reports:

> I was responsible for recording the actions of this convoy every step of the way so that it would be printed in that respected journal and all Muslims would learn about the actions of these missionaries in spreading the glorious religion of Islam and the Islamic movement.[437]

As a result, throughout the book we find him recording the actions of the Arab Muslim convoy with the particular obsession we found in Hedayat's other narrators (discussed above). Thus, as it may be guessed, everything the reporter witnesses in one way or another ends up discrediting the Muslims' "godly" intentions for sending missionaries to Europe. Bringing to mind the self-disparaging Arabs of Hedayat's other satirical work, *A Pearl Canon*, an Arab representative summarized the missionaries' potential intentions as

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[435] Kermāni, *Sad Khetābeh* (One Hundred Lectures) ed. Bahrām Chūbineh, 172.

[436] Kermāni, *Sad Khetābeh* (One Hundred Lectures) ed. Bahrām Chūbineh, 172.

[437] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 5.

follows: "Let's name this delegation Islamic Jihad (*al-Ǯihad ul-Islamiyyah*) so that we could kill their men and divide their women and camels amongst us."[438] This sentiment sets the stage for other members recommending looting and destroying the properties of the so-called "infidels," obfuscating the spiritual aspirations of the Islamic expedition.

From a civilizational standpoint, in his mind Hedayat considered the Arabs as backward and uncivilized as the so-called "savages" of Africa. This became clear when he cast a cannibal (*ādam-khār*) as the representative of Zanzibar. Speaking with broken language, the cannibal cannot contain himself thinking about the profits of "Islamicizing" the European lands:

> Mr. Tābūnānā, the respected representative of Zanzibar, stood up stark naked. Leaning on his mace, he said: "People's flesh very delicious! European is white! I eat two people every day!"[439]

Though not as cartoonish as the cannibal, the other Muslim dignitaries behave in a similar manner and express equally disturbing sentiments about the potential outcome of the Islamic mission. For example, an advisory board member named Sokkān ul-Sharia (lit. "helm of sharia") claims that he has a full-fledged plan for the Islamization of America (*yangi-ye donyā*) which would monopolize the country's resources through Islamic rituals:

> Many rich people live in America which is a country in the twelfth clime. Any one of them becoming a Muslim should obviously make a pilgrimage to Mecca. This way we can rob them on their way by a group of highwaymen we have stationed on the way to Mecca. Additionally, an operative must infect them with lice so that they would sacrifice a lamb for every louse they kill. It's even better if they kill two lambs since they're new converts and their families are still Christian. Those who

[438] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 6.

[439] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 6.

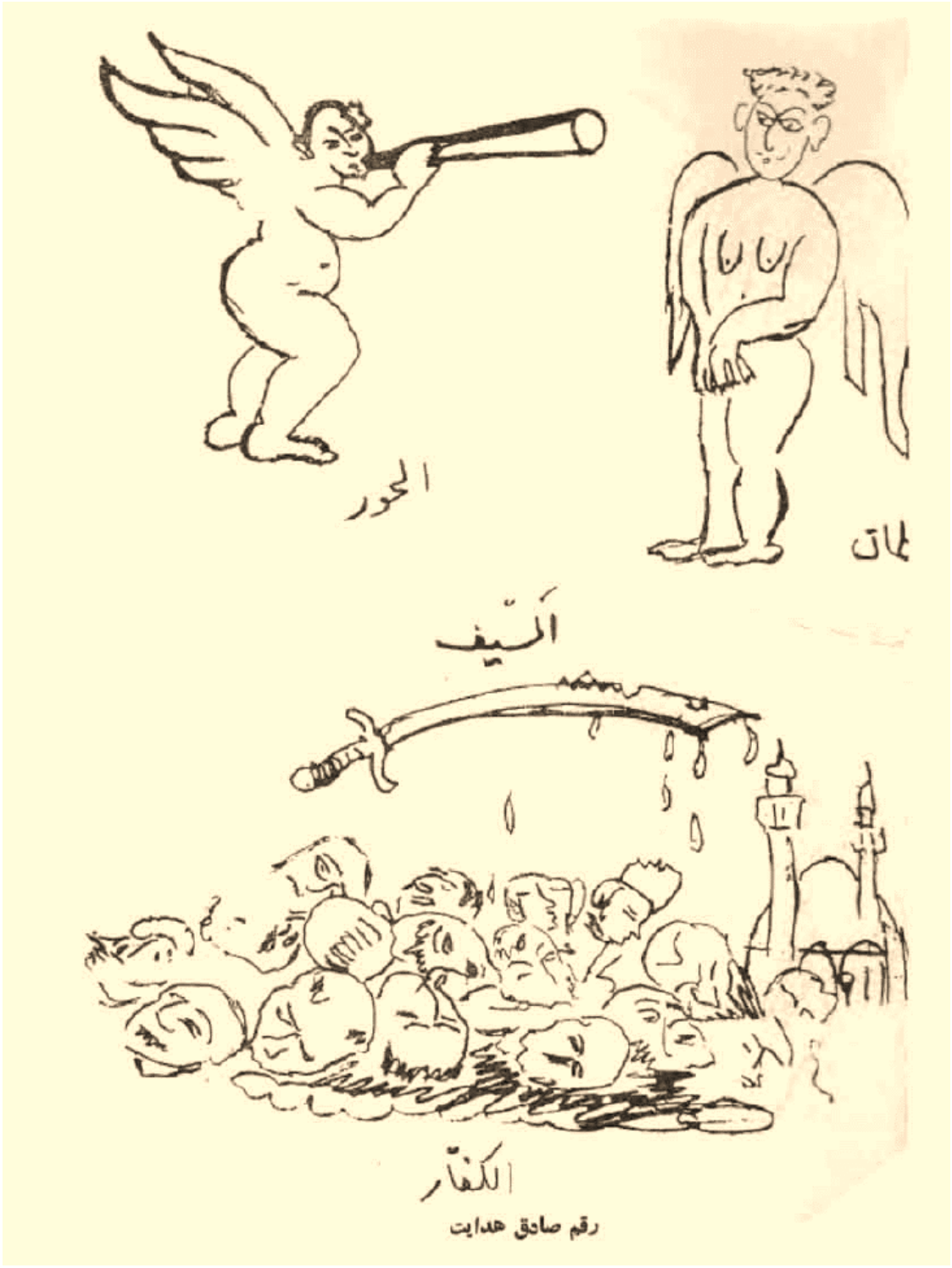
> do not convert, must pay tax and poll-tax (*jaziyyeh*) to the Muslim treasury otherwise it's lawful to take their properties. Their women shall be banned to return to their homes and their men shall be killed. (Audience applause)[440]

Imitating what we already found in *The Pearl Canon*, Hedayat's new cast of Arab characters engage in every deceitful and/or criminal activity in order to obtain some sort of financial advantage over the newly converted peoples. Like their predecessors (in the foregoing book), the charlatan Arabs of *A Muslim Delegation* never bother to pay attention to the spiritual implications of converting new peoples to Islam as plans for hoarding gold and fantasizing about European women consume their minds like a disease.

As we learn from Hedayat's letters to his close friend, Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi, he personally advocated for many of the beliefs and opinions he put in the mouth of his Arab characters. Complaining about annual expenses of the Hajj pilgrimage, on July 11, 1948 Hedayat wrote to Shahid-Nūrāʾi: "recently the government is fully attending to the propaganda surrounding sending pilgrims to Mecca. These mother fuckers whose numbers reach several thousands have been stealing people's money in the past years."[441] Hedayat saw the Muslim Iranians' putting their money into Hajj (in Saudi Arabia) as a continuation of the tendency he identified in his Arab Muslim characters. In the same letter, he also condemned (unnamed) nationalists for recommending budget cuts so that

[440] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 7.

[441] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrāʾi) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 139.



Picture 11: Illustrations of angels (top) and severed heads of “infidels” (bottom) underneath a “scimitar” – attributed to Hedayat (Katirāʾī 1970)

"several Persian embassies may be shut down in Europe but never caring to mention excessive spending going on in Mecca."[442]

If in *The Pearl Canon* we had to read between the lines of colonial figures in order to investigate the resemblances Hedayat perceived between European colonial endeavors and Islamic conquests, in *A Muslim Delegation* the Arabs draft a "description of actions and operations" which may be read as a mission statement for their Islamic expedition. In this statement every evil action Hedayat had invoked in his previous works is outlined and bragged about in a conceited language! A few examples should make this clear. Article One of this statement mandates Arabic language as the official language of the conquered peoples. Article Two sanctions the demolition of all buildings in the so-called "infidel" lands since they fail to protect women against strangers' eyes![443] As this article argued,

> According to the religion of Islam, it is preferable that rooms were made out of clay with low ceilings. This is because this world is transitory and should not be contemplated for long. Needless to say, demolishing any theatre, museum, playhouse, church, school and so on is a duty for these people.[444]

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[442] Hedayat, *Hashtād u Do Nāmeh be Hasan Shahid-Nūrā'i* (Eighty Two Letters to Hasan Shahid-Nūrā'i) ed. Nāser Pākdāman, 140.

[443] The "fenceless" design Hedayat attributed to European buildings brings to mind the quality he identified in the ancient Zoroastrian fire temple near Isfahan. As he intimated in his travel narrative, the "unrestricted" (unwalled) architecture of the ancient temple embodied the free spirit of Aryanism; in contrast to the enclosed structures that were built in the Islamic era by the so-called Semites. It appears that Hedayat put the European buildings on a par with the ancient Zoroastrian fire temple as both were antithetical to mosques.

[444] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 9.

As usual these questionable activities are framed by the authority of holy books. As a board member notified, "it is required that [the above actions] be based on verses from the Qurʿan so that [missionaries] perform them according to holy duties and prophetic traditions."[445] And, once again, the Arab Muslims neglect to account for the potentially criminal and/or inhumane underpinnings of their actions.

As we read on, we learn from the mission statement the new converts are expected to assimilate into Arab culture by adapting certain articles of Arab material culture. Similar to what I argued above, sections dealing with this topic, usually feature long lists of items that reduce Islam to the objects and rituals Hedayat associated with it. Burying the dead and organizing mourning ceremonies, digging waterways for public bathrooms and many other customs fill these pages. Recommendations about new Muslims donning Arab Bedouin gown (*ʿabāʾ*) and sandals (*naʿlein*) prompt one of the board members to quote an anecdote from a historical authority on the topic. As he explains,

> When they invaded Rome, the Arabs used to wrap themselves in camel hide. But when they entered the Romans' cereal cellars they found sacs filled with chaff and barley. They were very hungry so they cut holes in them and started eating their content with utmost delight. When they reached the top, they cut [additional] holes for their heads and hands. It was then that donning *ʿabāʾ* became a custom.[446]

The self-disparaging implications of passages such as the above tend to undermine the simulacrum of realism in the characters. Acting more like spokespersons in a script

[445] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 9.

[446] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 10. Not content with the damage anecdotes such as these can do, Hedayat has a scholar in the audience cite it as "authentic" information in his book on camel milk and lizard kabob!

written for them, the characterization of Arabs in this satirical work pose important questions about character motivation and plausibility. It appears that Hedayat consciously disregarded these inconsistencies to merely focus on the comedic potentials of caricature and pastiche. From a thematic standpoint, the fact that Hedayat's last satirical work is by and large a rehash of everything he had written previously only adds to the failure of *A Muslim Delegation* in doing anything other than creating comedic moments with a heavy-handed dramatic irony at the expense of Arabs.

The second chapter or "epistle" of the book starts off with reports on the blunders the missionaries made on their way to Europe. The comedy here is generated by Hedayat's satirizing the Arabs' inability to understand the trappings of modern life in a metropolitan city like Berlin which appears to be worlds apart from their culture and lifestyle. One of the functions of the detailed mission statement we find in the previous chapter was to underscore aspects of Arab culture and lifestyle so that they may be contrasted with European culture and modern lifestyle of Berliners in this section. The incongruity Hedayat perceived in imagining Arabs in Berlin is reminiscent of Kermāni's relentless criticism of a Balūch settling in Paris. As I shall argue in the coming section, Kermāni and Hedayat were inspired by the discourse of "othering" we find in European colonial texts as the representation of the "others" in their texts tend to mimic the representation of the so-called "savages" and "barbarians" in European colonial literature. The Eurocentrism I have investigated in Hedayat's works arguably came to a grotesque apogee when he relegated his Arab Muslim characters to the status of "savages" and paraded them in a "human zoo" in Berlin.

Sometimes the blunders the missionaries make are petty and inconsequential. Dressing inappropriately in public, looking for desert rats (*mūsh-e sahrā'ī*) as souvenir in Berlin, or remodeling hotel rooms to look like traditional Arab houses/mosques rarely jeopardize their mission or put the Europeans in dangerous situations. These mostly provide opportunities for Hedayat to satirize the missionaries' Arabo-Muslim culture which usually prevents them from assimilating to the norms prevalent in European environments. Modern technology was an area the Muslim missionaries suffered most from due to their unfamiliarity with it. Disheartened by the unpleasant experience of riding trains for the first time, this is how one of the missionaries expressed his nostalgia for the good old days:

> God damn them! Be honest with me, is donkey better or this thing that I don't know what it's called? It spits water and fire! It whistles and makes noises! It puffs smoke and drags you three hundred time until it takes you to your destination. This is the donkey of Anti-Christ! My late father travelled from Samara to Khanaqin with an emaciated donkey in pure health even though he was robbed six times. I can't trust this thing with my life.[447]

The Arabs' avoiding modern amenities because of their assumed conflict with Islamic rules was another topic Hedayat satirized in this work. For example, after finding lodging at the hotel, Mr. Sokkān ul-Sharia turns to his group and warns them not to use tap water at the hotel. He justified his instruction by basing it on *sharia* rules that appear to be opposite the tenets of modern health and sanitation:

> Since we are epitomes of Islam, we should act in way so that these infidels can learn from us. This means we won't touch hotel's tap water. For cooking, ablution and cleaning purposes we must use water from the nearby river. Even though

[447] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 16.

> sewage and garbage is dumped in it but its water is clean according to Islamic sharia since it's running water.[448]

News about the missionaries spread quickly and create a sensation in the city. Thus, as we learn, a local newspaper "with big words on its front page announced: 'Arrival of Dear Guests – today a group of wealthy Oriental actors (*ārtist-hā-ye pūldār-e mashreq zamīn*) arrive in Berlin'."[449] Turning the Arab Muslims into actors framed them in a discourse of theatricality which set the stage for the ultimate spectacle of the story – the Arabs turning themselves into an animalistic performance at a zoological garden. Made famous by the press, every movement of the Muslim delegation became a sensation for the people who flock to gaze at them everywhere they go. Even a simple plan for enjoying Berlin's beautiful gardens produces a swarm of people watching them with wonder and amazement. Moments like these are carefully described by the reporter accompanying the group:

> Stepping out of the hotel, a large group of people came to watch us (*be tamāshā-ye mā āmadand*). At Friedrichstraße and Unter den Lin-den their number increased so much so that we could not find the time to make tea. Girls with bare arms and chests used to walk in front of us and smiled at us. Mr. ʿAndalīb used to put his gown (*ʿabā'*) over his turban and was asking forgiveness from God [for looking at immodestly dressed women].[450]

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[448] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 18. In Islamic jurisprudence, tap water and water of streams are considered "running" or "flowing" water. This type of water may be used for purifying *najes* or ritually unclean things. Hedayat twisted this rule to ridicule the "uncivilized" Arabs who apparently use tap water for the first time in their lives.

[449] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 19.

[450] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 20.

Without knowing it, the Arabs put their alterity into the spotlight when they went on a promenade in downtown Berlin. Their "exotic" appearance (Arab Bedouin garb) and "improper" behavior (camping in a business district) turned them into a *spectacle*, or objects of curiosity, attracting a swarm of spectators. As it has been observed, the incident described above occurred constantly to the "Oriental" travelers visiting Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An observation made by an Indo-Persian writer, Mirzā Eʿtesām ud-Din, who visited England in 1766–9 is a case in point here. Finding himself at the center of everybody's attention, he noted in his diary: "The young and old gazed at my countenance and shape and I stared at their beauty and face. I journeyed for a spectacle and became a spectacle myself."[451] Hedayat's satire capitalize on aspects of Arab alterity, especially at the moment when it poses as an incomprehensible spectacle to European "others." The wandering gaze of the Berliners' is reminiscent of the British nobility's apparent inability to accept Mirzā Eʿtesām ud-Din as a "normal" human being. Invited to a ballroom, the Indo-Persian visitor is paraded as an object of curiosity:

> One day some people took me along with them to the assembly-room, where were ladies and gentlemen and a band of music. As soon as we arrived there, a stop was put to the dancing and music, and they all began to stare at me, and having examined my robe, turban, shawl, and other parts of my costume, they thought that it was a dress for dancing or acting in. I endeavoured to persuade them to the contrary, but they would not believe me; and everyone in the assembly continued to gaze at my dress and appearance, and I continued observing their excellent

[451] Quoted in Tavakoli, *Refashioning Iran*, 35. For a discussion of Mirzā Eʿtesām ud-Din's diary (Per. *Shegarf-nāmeh-ye Velāyat*) see Schürer, "Sustaining Identity in I'tesamuddin's *The Wonders of Vilayet*."

> entertainment: and it is singular that I, who went to see a spectacle, became myself a sight to others.[452]

Up until now, the attention the missionaries get is benign and more out of sheer curiosity. As we learn from the reporter,

> Renowned photographers took pictures from us in different poses. Then again, a large group of people surrounded us, asking us to autograph the pictures they had taken from us. But since we could not communicate, we ended up adding to each other's wonders more than anything else.[453]

The challenge of encountering gazing crowds soon gave way to more complicated predicaments as the missionaries found themselves trapped in a narrative that pushed them to the brink of bankruptcy and public opprobrium. After the gazing crowds go away, the missionaries are approached by a film producer who intends to hire them as actors. The producer informs them of his plans for making three movies which included *Sirat-e ʿAntar* (lit. "The Ways of the Baboon").[454] Enticed by the prospect of acting in films, one of the missionaries says to the producer: "I have always been an actor. I play the corpse in *taʿziyeh* performances [passion plays]. When they carry me on a door slab, everybody thinks I'm legitimately dead!"[455] The last person running into them is the manager of a well-known circus called Circus Bosch. However, without an interpreter he cannot impress the missionaries and thus leaves.

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[452] Eʿtesām ud-Din, *Shigurf Namah i Velaët* (trans. J.E. Alexander), 37-8.

[453] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 20-1.

[454] Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat*, 79. *Sirat-e ʿAntar* is a romance in Arabic about ʿAn-tar ibn Shaddād, a sixth-century poet and warrior. A homophone of ʿAntar in Persian means "baboon" which appears to be the source of this joke by Hedayat.

[455] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 20.

Back in the hotel, they are greeted by the manager of "Sūʾo Gārten," a zoological garden in Berlin. His interpreter congratulates the missionaries since their "fame has reached the four corners of the world!" Then, he discusses the proposal his manager has for them:

> Because of this, the zoo manager has organized an Oriental Exhibition at the zoo garden and wishes the dear gusts to join it. We implore you to be his guests for at least a few days if you're not planning to do this forever. Everything has been done to guarantee your comfort and we shall gladly accept any conditions you may have.[456]

The naïve Arabs accept the offer when they hear about "a green garden filled with creeping, flying and running creatures." This, they think, will give them an opportunity to enjoy Berlin's beautiful gardens which was made impossible previously by swarms of spectators and especially (European) rules of propriety. To them, the only thing missing in that picture was *seyyed-e sabz-qabā* (green-garbed *seyyed*) which they shall perform at the exhibition.[457] Thus, the next day a red sign is installed near the zoo, inviting people to visit the "Oriental Exhibition" (*namāyeshgāh-e sharqi*).

By parading their alterity in a human zoo or anthropological exhibition in Europe Hedayat explored their presumably "uncivilized" lifestyle and also religion. The microcosm of Islamic society the Arabs create at the zoo was complete with rituals and ceremonies relating to matrimony and mourning. Reminiscing with certain joy, the ex-Muslim missionary recalled the episode in great detail:

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[456] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 21.

[457] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 21. In Islam, a *seyyed* is believed to be a decedent of the family of Prophet Mohammad (from ʿAli and Fatemeh).

Picture 12: “Oriental Exhibition” – illustration attributed to Hedayat (Katirāʾī 1970)

> You didn't know that we accepted the offer of the manager of Suʾo Gārten? Since we were helpless and were left high and dry, for two-three months we made great money there. They gave us a house. No, it was a palace! Plus 25 Marks for daily wage which included food and clothes. In the garden there was any kind of creature you could imagine. […] We had a great time there and missed you! Girls as beautiful as the sun would come to watch us. Once I picked two of them! Our job was to play man and wife and then perform temporary marriage, divorce and public mourning (*rowzeh*). People used to laugh [with joy and excitement] and clapped for us! Our pictures were printed in newspapers. To be honest with you, when our pictures appeared everywhere, people in the Muslim lands started thinking we were earnestly spreading Islam. Thus, alms started to pour from the four corners of the world to support us.[458]

The memorabilia they sell to the visitors at the zoo (bathroom pitcher and Bedouin sandals) associated the foregoing picture with Arab material culture, revealing the Arabizing potential of Islam, according to Hedayat. It may be argued that the Arabs' little paradise was a reflection of *ferdows* or the "promised garden" of Paradise in Islam. This may be understood as a continuation of Hedayat's preoccupation with the concept and makeup of paradise in Islamic tradition (discussed in the Introduction). He took his grudge against the Arabs and Islam to the next level when he represented their vision of ideal bliss as "savagery" if displayed in a European ethnographical exhibition. Since green is usually associated with spiritual figures in the Islamic tradition – the angels in Paradise, Prophet Muhammad (who is believed to have favored this color) and Khezr[459] – the Arabs' enacting *seyyed-e sabz-qabā* may also be read as a parody of Prophet

[458] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 27.

[459] Khezr is believed to be a descendent of Noah and an esteemed spiritual figure in the Qurʿan. His color is green and like the god of fertility cults, he turns everything into greenery if he touches them. See *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Khezr."

Muhammad in Paradise.[460] In other words, what Hedayat started in his travelogue, came to a bizarre culmination in *A Muslim Delegation* when he relegated Islamic vison of paradise into the status of "savagery" from an entirely Eurocentric viewpoint.

The final chapter of the book purports to be an addendum (*zamimeh*) the writer appended to his previous reports since it sheds light on the fate of the Muslim delegation two and half years after the Oriental Exhibition. To our surprise, the first thing we learn here is that the missionaries have transformed into street thugs in Paris, earning a living as bartender, card-player and procurer. The reporter's inquiries about their transformation initiate a torrent of confessions that presumably expose the "real" truth about their Islamic expedition. As we saw in *The Pearl Canon*, Hedayat used the trope of confession to shed light on what he believed to be the darkest secrets of Islam, as Muslims manipulated religion to pursue their own ungodly goals. Similar tropes reappear in *A Muslim Delegation* though less artistically – if what Hedayat did in *The Pearl Canon* was "artful" in any sense. As one of the missionaries confessed: "when we started this bamboozle (*janghūlak bāzi*) we made plans so that all of us could steal the money."[461] As I explained in the previous sections, Hedayat explored the affinities he perceived between Arab Muslim conquests and certain European colonial endeavors in *The Pearl Canon*. Here, in the *A Muslim Delegation*, he continued to do the same by mobilizing the discourse of "othering" he apparently appropriated from certain European works in an effort to represent the Arabs and/or Muslims as "savages" and "barbarians" in an apparent

[460] For associations of the color green with Islam see "Islamic Green" in Pastoureau, *Green: History of a Color*, 46-9. Also see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 102.

[461] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 25.

parallelism that put Persians on a par with the Europeans. This self-fashioning arrogated to Hedayat the superiority we find in many European texts, turning turned him into a would-be colonial surrogate, especially at the moment he tried to approximate the tropes and discourses European colonial writers unleash against their Indian and/or African "others."

The missionaries' new occupations in Paris let Hedayat expose the dishonesty he identified in their pious behavior when they set out to spread Islam in Europe. For example, before coming to Paris, one of the missionaries vehemently disapproved of alcoholic drinks which he considered a great sin in his religion. He used to go to great extents in order to prove his orthodox approach in this regard: "If a drop of wine falls into the sea, and they fill that sea with dirt so a hill is formed, and sheep graze from the grass that has grown at the top of that hill, I won't touch the meat of those sheep."[462] Yet, as we learn in the final chapter, this very individual takes up the profession of a bartender in Paris, bragging in public that he drinks a bottle of vermouth every night before going to sleep![463]

Another related topic Hedayat explored in *A Muslim Delegation* is the affinities he perceived between certain aspects of Islam and unscrupulous activities such as prostitution. To him, the Shiʿi tradition of *sīgheh* or temporary marriage was like institutionalizing prostitution. What we learn from a very pious Muslim called ʿAndalīb

[462] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 26.

[463] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 23-4.

ul-Islam (lit. "Nightingale of Islam") – now a procurer in Paris – reveals this presumed similarity:

> You remember Jean, no, ʿAndalīb ul-Islam? He who used to ask forgiveness from God when he looked at women and we had to carry him around since he didn't want to open his eye in Berlin? Well, he's a procurer here. He's a pimp and sometimes fixes me as well. His business is not too bad. Yesterday he was laughing and telling me: "I was destined to become a pimp! When I was in Samara I used to procure women for 24-hour temporary marriages (*sīgheh*). Here, I procure women to do it for an hour! The 23-hour difference is because people here value their time more than those living in the Islamic lands."[464]

As I said above, with the help of the zoo manager, the missionaries introduced a line of memorabilia, selling four hundred Arab sandals (*naʿlein*) and bathroom pitchers (*lola-heng*) to the visitors at the zoo garden. Lucrative entrepreneurial endeavors such as these convinced the missionaries to take their show to other European cities as well. "But in our hearts," the ex-missionary contemplated, "we laughed at these stupid Europeans. Things that were our daily business made them laugh [with joy and excitement]."[465] This was how they traveled to Paris but ultimately failed to repeat their success in Berlin.

Unable to comprehend their deceit and shrewdness, the reporter censured the missionaries for exploiting Islam. The give-and-take that ensues between them sets in motion an elaborate harangue against Muslims and Islamic civilization which fills the final pages of the book. Parts of this unforgiving and relentless harangue reads:

> What religion are you talking about? Is Islam anything other than looting and bloodshed? Every rule that it's got concerns either your groins or buttocks. Have you forgotten how Qūt Lāyamūt [a Muslim scholar] described Islamic creed? That either you become a Muslim and act according to *Zobdat ul-Nejāsāt* (lit. "Best

[464] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 26.

[465] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 27.

> Filths") or we'll kill you or pay poll-tax to us? This is all the logic Islam has got – blazing swords and panhandling.[466]

Challenging his condescending attitude, the reporter asks him about "the praise Islam has received from European scholars and philosophers." Not intending to slow down, the Arab takes his criticism to the next level:

> It's driven by their colonial policies. These books are instructions for controlling Orientals so that they can dominate us better. Which poison or opium is better than the fatalistic mentality of Jews and Muslims which has deprived them of good spirits and temperaments? Take a look at the map and see how all Muslim nations are poor and wretched, working as spies and lackeys. Colonial nations pay greedy, moneygrubbing writers to incite division between Indians and Muslims.[467]

Blamed again for his condescending attitude toward Islamic civilization, the ex-missionary argued,

> Which civilization?! You want to know about Arab civilization, take a look at *Āsār ul-Islam fi Savāhel ul-Anhār* (lit. "Works of Islam in River Banks") where Sheikh Crocodile talks about nothing but camel milk, camel dung, Arab gown (*ʿabāʾ*) and grilling lizards. The rest is made by the conquered peoples who have associated their own creations with the Arabs. Why after they were defeated [by the Persians] the Arabs returned to their origin and started following lizards with their *kafiyyeh ʿaqāl* (Arab head dress)?[468]

And the final supposed exposé of the book reiterates what Hedayat had said in his other satirical work, *The Pearl Canon*. Divulging his darkest secrets, the ex-missionary confided in the reporter with an air of grandeur and self-praise:

> This is our business! We specialize in swindling people (*khar kardan-e mardom*)! […] My father used to say: these people are possessed. If I don't exorcise them [by bamboozling them] somebody else will. So, as long as people are stupid, we

[466] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 27.

[467] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 28.

[468] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 28.

> should take advantage of them. You know what? We should thank God for surviving here since they would have locked us up in a madhouse if we had proselytized here.[469]

Very little scholarship exists on Hedayat's satirical works, especially *A Muslim Delegation* which was printed only recently. The highly inflammatory anti-Arab and anti-Islamic content of these books may be responsible for serious readers sidestepping these texts. Bahrām Chūbineh, the editor of 1982 edition of *A Muslim Delegation*, is among the few who has remarked on aspects of this work. As we learn from his introductory comments, he praises *A Muslim Delegation* since "the accuracy" of what Hedayat has said here "cannot be doubted by anybody" To this editor, Hedayat "was a thinker who knew the scandals of his society and used to expose them by any means."[470] The book's enlightened readers were also commended by Chūbineh for supporting Hedayat's works (abroad) since in a few months the book's first edition became out-of-print. "Such reception and thirst for understanding political and religious issues," Chūbineh concluded, "is a sign of self-scrutiny and freedom from the shackles of superstition. These are first steps toward re-creating and recognizing values."[471] What these "values" are exactly is left moot by the editor.

Although the grotesque anti-Arab representations we find in *A Muslim Delegation* are mostly overlooked in Chūbineh's comments, yet certain degree of awareness (and perhaps guilt) may be arguably perceived in his commentaries. For example, consider the

[469] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 28.

[470] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 6.

[471] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 8.

following judgment: "Everything Hedayat has written is an interesting though ghastly mockery (*rishkhandi delchasb amma delhorehāvar*). With his enchanting pen, he let his characters dance in front of the readers so that their body and soul may be tickled."[472] Indeed, Hedayat made his Arab characters "dance" at the Oriental Exhibition in Berlin; however, it would be an understatement to describe the detrimental discourse he mobilized for parading Arabs in Berlin as anything intellectually edifying. We may sympathize with Hedayat for his unwavering fight against social injustice and especially religious superstition in modern Iran. Yet, posing as an imperial European, and displaying the presumably "uncivilized" deeds and creeds of his Arab "other" in a human zoo is something nobody can or should defend – even for the most patriotic reasons we can imagine for them.

Modern recrudescence of anti-Arab representation tends to be adeptly porous when it comes to incorporating new tropes and discourses into the corpus of the Persianate literature. Hedayat's works, especially his satirical writings, are like nexus where diverse ideological and/or discursive strands come together to form a complex intertextual palimpsest.

Either organized by relatively unknown literary societies that are associated with local Iranian community, or produced by a celebrity choreographer and dramatist called Shāhrokh Moshkīn-qalam, dramatizations of Hedayat's work continue to add to the work's ostensible "relevance" to modern anti-Arab sentiment in Persianate societies.

[472] Hedayat, *A Muslim Delegation* (ed. Chūbineh), 7.

BBC Persian's report on Shāhrokh Moshkīn-qalam's dramatization of *A Muslim Delegation* at 23rd Iranian Theatre Festival in Köln, Germany, marks the latest attempt in recent years.[473] Calling it "the best play of the second day" of the festival, BBC Persian's report arguably implicated itself in editorial reflections that celebrate Hedayat's work for predicting what would presumably befall Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Shojāʿ ud-Din Shafā, the editor of Hedayat's work (2001), celebrated the work's pertinence to contemporary Iran: "either for their mise en scène or their themes, the conversations [in *A Muslim Delegation*] sound much like what is going on today in Iran. It is hard to believe that Hedayat wrote these more than seventy years ago in 1930."[474]

A few months before staging it at 23rd Iranian Theatre Festival in Köln, Shāhrokh Moshkīn-qalam delivered a dramatized reading (or *namāyesh-khāni* as he calls it) of *A Muslim Delegation* at Café du Pont Neuf in Paris on December 9, 2016. In a video recording of this reading, we see him waving Shojāʿ ud-Din Shafā's edition and uttering words that are similar to what was quoted in the previous paragraph.[475] Thus, Moshkīn-qalam celebrated the "prophetic" quality of Hedayat's work once again, claiming that "if our fathers had read this work they we would not have seen the Islamic Revolution." Sadly, Hedayat's blatantly racist rhetoric and imagery are applauded by the audience in the video.

[473] For report on the festival in Köln see www.bbc.com/persian/arts-38065017.

[474] Hedayat, *Afsāneh-ye Āfarinesh* (The Myth of Creation) ed. Shafā, 10.

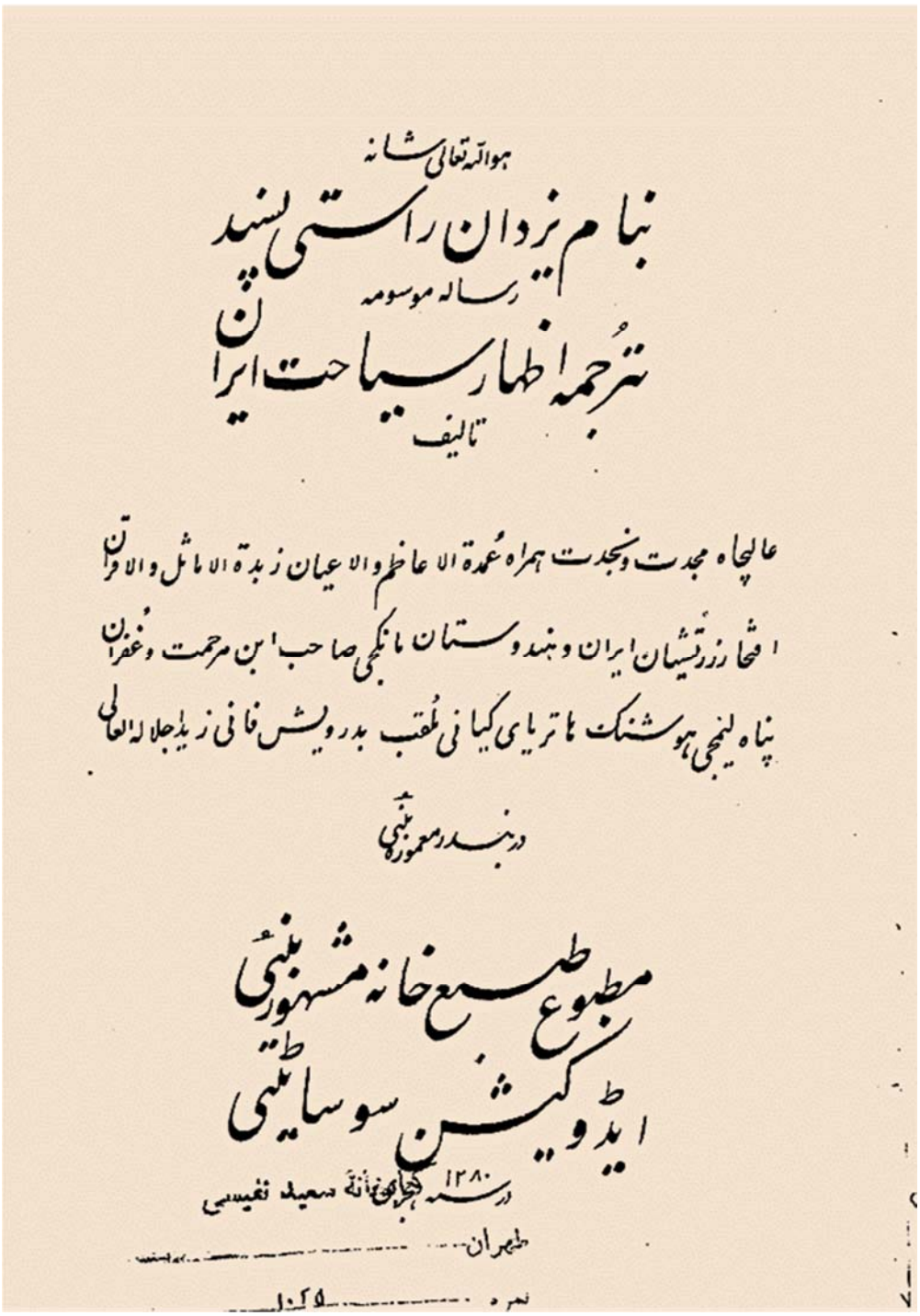
[475] For the video, see https://youtu.be/cxWqZUiz_lA.

Chapter Four: Parsis and Emergence of Antiquarianism in Iran

Amidst the foregoing panorama of rising awareness about Iran's pre-Islamic past, we can identify a non-Iranian figure in the final decades of the nineteenth century whose intellectual stamina had an enduring effect on the Iranian intellectuals, bringing the pre-Islamic (Zoroastrian) heritage of their country to their attention and making antiquarianism an intellectual avocation for those who sought to rediscover that heritage. This figure was Manekji Limji Hataria (1813–1890), the emissary sent from Mumbai to Iran by the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of Zoroastrians in Persia.[476]

In this chapter I will argue that the identity of "the Arabs" was the product of emergent antiquarianism in the latter half of the nineteenth century among the Parsis of India. By investigating the material vestiges of pre-Islamic civilizations of Iran – a country they considered their "ancestral homeland" – certain Parsis posited a social and cultural hierarchy in which the Persians were at the top and the Arabs at the very bottom. In the Parsi antiquarian writing I shall examine here, the material craftsmanship of pre-Islamic ruins was turned into a standard of cultural excellences, separating the "superior" Persian civilization from an "inferior" Arab one. It is my contention that studying the emergence of antiquarianism in India in the latter half of the nineteenth century can help

[476] For information on Hataria and the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of Zoroastrians in Persia that sent him to Iran see Boyce, "Manekji Limji Hataria in Iran;" Zia-Ebrahimi, "An Emissary of the Golden Age;" and *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v., "Manekji Limji Hataria."



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بنام یزدان راستی پسند

رساله موسومه

ترجمه اظهار سیاحت ایران

تالیف

عالیجاه مجدت و نجدت همراه عمدة الاعاظم والاعیان زبدة الاماثل والاقران

افتخار زرتشتیان ایران و هندوستان مانکجی صاحب ابن مرحمت و غفران

پناه لیمجی هوشنگ هاتریای کیانی ملقب بدرویش فانی زید اجلاله العالی

در بندر معموره بمبئی

مطبوع طبع خانه مشهور بمبئی

ایڈوکیشن سوسائٹی

در سنه ۱۲۸۰ هجری بخانهٔ سعید نفیسی

طهران

نمره ۱۰۲۵

Picture 13: title page of Persian translation of Hataria's 1865 travelogue

us understand how "the Arabs" were systematically imagined in conjunction with the ills they purportedly performed against the monuments of the pre-Islamic Iran.

As we learn from the account of his travels in Iran, titled *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān* (Essay on Description of a Travel to Iran, 1865), Hataria's early education was focused on history and geography. "During childhood," he wrote, "this traveler carefully obtained the histories of Zoroastrian (*pārsiyān*) kings and grandees and translated them into Gujarati."[477] In order to expand his resources, he started collecting evidence in India and travelled the country extensively to "study a variety of historical books in many languages." Less than satisfactory results led Hataria to consider travelling to Iran in order to finish his plan: "I prepared for a trip [to Iran] so that I could collect all historical texts I looked for and study them fully."[478]

As an enthusiastic antiquarian, Hataria also drew on numismatic data and reproductions of ancient reliefs for useful information about the Zoroastrian kings of Iran. The findings of his quest in Iran were enormous:

> During my stay and travel in Iran, although in appearance I was busy with other responsibilities, but in reality night and day I was searching for historical manuscripts, old coins and ancient insignia (*ʿalāmāt-hā-ye qadim*); and did everything to obtain anything I could find anywhere. Thanks be given God that now I possess an assortment of credible (*moʿtabar*) historical manuscripts, old

[477] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 28-9.

[478] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 29. The English version of this narrative lists the languages Hataria studied which included "Persian, Khila Roki script, in Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, English, German and many other languages both from Iran and from India." See Hataria, "Travels in Iran," 17-8.

> coins and [reproductions of] ancient reliefs. I have fully availed myself of all histories.[479]

In order to reassemble the history of pre-Islamic Iran, Hataria scrutinized the remains of the material culture the Zoroastrian kings had left behind. He looked for and studied ruins of ancient fortresses, remains of fire temples and any other ancient monumental architecture that belonged to Iran's antiquity. Categorizing this type of information under the rubric of "pictures and signs of prior kings" or "tablets of ancient scripts," Hataria visited a large number of ancient sites and monuments in Iran during his stay in Iran.

The Parsi emissary was aware of the work previous travelers had done and saw himself contributing to a long history of antiquarian activity in Iran. Comparing his work with that of others, he took pride in the wealth of material he had accumulated: "without a doubt one can say that few past or present travelers had noticed those signs and had described them the way I have."[480] Indeed his catalogue of ancient sites and locations appear to go beyond what he discovered in works such as ibn Balkhi's *Fārsnāmeh*, a twelfth century history of the Fars.

During the time he stayed in Iran, Hataria established ties with a network of individuals that included ayatollahs, governors and dignitaries. His tireless effort was directed at creating urgency for the project of rediscovery of the pre-Islamic Iran. As we learn from recently published documents, commissioning histories of ancient localities in Iran was a project he pursued with the help of certain officials. This project was apparently intended to preserve the oral history of these ancient localities; a history that

[479] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 29.

[480] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 26.

the Parsi emissary considered as gradually vanishing from the face of the earth. Histories of the cities of Kerman and Kashan were among the projects Hataria commissioned in 1870s and 1880s.[481]

Written by Abdul-Rahim Kalāntar Zarrābi (d. 1891), a prominent resident of the city of Kashan, *Tārikh-e Kāshān* (The History of Kashan, 1871) purported to be a compilation of information the author had collected from the local residents (oral histories) as well as from certain works of history.[482] In a letter affixed to the copy of the manuscript at the British Museum, the author explained how his work was composed in response to the questions Hataria had sent him from Tehran through the governor of Kashan.[483] Some of the questions included, "when was the city of Kashan built; who was its builder; who were this land's [original] sovereigns; and what was their religion?"[484] *Tārikh-e Kāshān* thus consisted of information pertaining to the history, geography and ethnography of this ancient city. Hataria's instructing these writers with lists of questions may be interpreted as his studying history through the existing material culture, opening up new vistas for a revised and modern historiography that re-inscribed voices that had been put under erasure.

Kalāntar summarized his findings in the Introduction: "Thus it became clear that until then Kashan and Qom were not separate and independent cities; and before *hejrat* [i.e., before the advent of Islam] not many people lived there. Each city had a few fortresses

[481] Amini, *Asnādi az Zartushtiyān-e Moʿaser-e Iran*, 12.

[482] Kalāntar, *Tārikh-e Kāshān*, 3.

[483] For a copy of the letter see Afhsar, "Introduction," iii-viii.

[484] Kalāntar, *Tārikh-e Kāshān*, 3. See also Afshar, "Introduction," iii-viii.

(*qalʿeh*) with Zoroastrians (*majūsān*) inhabiting them."[485] Kalāntar recognized the Zoroastrians as the original residents of the city of Kashan. Once Muslim conquerors took control of the area, the writer continued, "they occupied the lands and fields and annihilated the Zoroastrians, erecting the fortress and barricade of the city of Qom."[486] As I shall explain shortly, the *topoi* of invading Arabs annihilating the indigenous Zoroastrian population became a leitmotif in certain works of historiography in late Qajar and especially early Pahlavi eras. As preoccupation with Arabs and Islam increased – as causes of Iran's "backward" condition in the twentieth century – Arabs and Islam started to gain various narrative embellishments.

Attending to the Ruins of the Nation

Hataria showed profound attachment to the ruins of pre-Islamic civilizations of Iran. The Parsi traveler's wandering gaze identified almost every "ruinous" edifice or fortress he found in Iran, pointing out their deteriorating conditions as they had suffered neglect throughout the ages. Acknowledging this neglect and bemoaning it slowly entered public discourse as Persian elite gradually took up the habit of attending their nation's ancient monuments. Amidst the decay, Hataria saw hope for a better future. For the Parsi traveler, in the detritus of the Islamic Iran, ruined fire temples and decrepit schools and palaces radiated as relics of a superior culture that had survived the ravages of a horrendous conquest. Surveying the ancient topography of Iran, Hataria occasionally

[485] Kalāntar, *Tārikh-e Kāshān*, 3.

[486] Kalāntar, *Tārikh-e Kāshān*, 4.

observed edifices that symbolized this perseverance: "At the foot of the mountain [near Shiraz] there is an old *atash kadeh* [fire temple] whose edifice is still unbroken."[487]

In passages where he described ancient Iran's glory, Hataria reveals certain partiality toward the pre-Islamic past. For example, after praising the crafty and artistic Iranians, Hataria describes their architecture as a symbol of their "civilized" status:

> In art and architecture also they [Iranians] were pioneers. Their edifices, buildings, palaces, forts and other monuments were not built of bricks, stones and mortar, with wood and iron as is done today. They were mostly carved in mountains, particularly at great heights. There were reasons for that. Iran is a mountainous country and there is very little place for building extensive monuments.[488]

Reminiscing over the advanced technology ancient Iranians must have used for the construction of these monuments filled Hataria with pride and nostalgia. Everywhere he looked, he found "inscriptions" and "forts in ruinous condition" that spoke of a superior civilization, lying in detritus. Observations such as the one quoted above convinced Hataria that "the ancient Iranians were far superior and civilized than the people of today."[489]

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[487] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 63.

[488] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 63. The undated English translation of Hataria's travelogue (done by Jamshed M. Bilimoria and gifted to K.R. Cama Oriental Institute) tends to "modernize" the non-specialist vocabulary Hataria used when he talked about Persian antiquity. The English version's modern vocabulary ("inscriptions" instead of "signs") stands in contrast to the Persian rendition and especially Hataria's recently published letters. The latter two show an earlier stage of antiquarian thought as non-specialist vocabulary tends to dominate the texts.

[489] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 63.

To Hataria, lack of historical consciousness he identified in the people of Iran was the reason behind the loss of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage.[490] He complained that the Iranians "have no record of what happened to their mighty palaces, forts and other monuments. Even those who remained in Iran [i.e., the indigenous Zoroastrian community] had suffered oppression at the hands of the Arabs had not the faintest idea of these things."[491] As a result, during the years Hataria lived in Iran he worked tirelessly to reassemble this lost history – through having that history written down by the people who possessed the knowledge, or instructing the Persian elite to acquire antiquarian knowledge in an attempt to rediscover that lost past.

In addition to commissioning local histories, such as the *History of Kāshān*, Hataria reached out to certain Persian intelligentsia to help him collect information about the remains of their country's antiquity. Instructing them to create sketches of pre-Islamic inscriptions and monuments was arguably meant to help the Iranian intelligentsia to acquire antiquarian skills. As we learn from a letters Hataria sent to an unnamed recipient (*c.* 1879), he gave instructions on how a sketch of Ardeshir I reliefs at Dārāb may be made for him since "its map (*naqsheh*) had been missing from [Hataria's] library."[492] The instructions reveal the Parsi traveler's meticulous attention to detail so that a faithful copy of the ancient rock reliefs may be obtained. The letter explained: "please find a master painter or a good photographer in Shiraz who could map these figures in entirety"

[490] In the next section I shall discuss the "enlightened" position of the Parsis in regards to historical consciousness and perceptionns about prehistory of Iran.

[491] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

[492] Amini, *Asnādi az Zartushtiyān-e Moʿaser-e Iran,* 30.

(*naqsheh az in sūrat-hā betamām-hā bardārad*).[493] Hataria even took the time to provide logistical advice on how such a task may be physically accomplished:

> Since the mountain is high and eyes can't see from the mountainside, something like a catapult or a scaffold should be made so that the painter or the photographer can sit on it. The sketch must include all figures; and if there is a line, it should be reproduced faithfully. This is because, for example, if there are forty figures, and one is copied incorrectly, that sketch is imperfect and useless.[494]

Recently published documents can help us piece together the emergence of antiquarian research in Iran in the final decades of the nineteenth century. This information reveals the seminal role Hataria played in organizing the earliest archaeological expeditions in Iran by indigenous antiquarians. Equipping them with the arts of antiquarianism not only enabled the Parsi emissary to acquire "authentic" information, but also helped him to *co-opt* the Persian elite in his quest for rediscovering the pre-Islamic heritage of Iran.

Of the many antiquarian works that were commissioned by Hataria, or were inspired by his intellectual fervor, perhaps the most well-known was *Āsār-e ʿAjam* (Works of Non-Arabs [i.e., the Persians], 1896). This stupendous work of history, geography and antiquarianism was compiled by Muhammad-Nasir Forsat ud-Dowleh Shirazi (1854-1920), a talented poet, painter and land surveyor. The detailed sketches we find in this work were among the first done by an Iranian artist who was genuinely interested in antiquarian research.

In his Introduction, Forsat ud-Dowleh recounted that in 1887 Hataria sent him "instructions" (*dastūr ul-ʿamal*) from Tehran for "map[ping] old buildings of Fars;

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[493] Amini, *Asnādi az Zartushtiyān-e Moʿaser-e Iran,* 30.

[494] Amini, *Asnādi az Zartushtiyān-e Moʿaser-e Iran,* 30.

surveying certain elevations and some lands."[495] As always, Hataria offered to pay for the costs of this expedition in full. Forsat ud-Dowleh followed the instructions and diligently worked to find the answer for Hataria's questions but by the time he sent his findings to Tehran, Hataria he had died in 1890.

Another late nineteenth century work of history that may be connected to Hataria was Mirza Esmāʿil Tūiserkāni's *Farāzestān* (1894). Written entirely in pure Persian (*fārsi-ye sareh*), Tūiserkāni paid homage to the Parsi emissary by incorporating a large number of so-called Dasātiri vocabulary into its text. This work was so steeped in the Dasātiri mystique – both rhetorically and as far as its chronology of Persian history was concerned – that Hataria felt the need to write an introductory epistle on. This epistle is now known as *Moqaddameh-ye Farāzestān* (Introduction to Farāzestān, 1887). Here, Hataria embraced the incipient nationalism that had come to Iran in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

Ideological Baggage

The antiquarian fervor Hataria kindled among the Iranian intellectuals came with certain ideological baggage. This ideological baggage involved the Parsi emissary's penchant for considering the pre-Islamic Iran as superior to the Islamic one. In his writings, Hataria cast the modern history of Iran as a narrative of decline where the pre-Islamic era was an idyllic paradise (*Iran-e minū neshān*) and the Arab invasion of Iran a catastrophic event,

[495] Forsat ud-Dowleh, *Āsār-e ʿAjam*, 2.

ushering an era of chaos and stagnation. In this narrative of decline, the Arabs played the role of bloodthirsty marauders who destroyed that idyllic picture.

Previously I explained how Hataria bemoaned the great neglect he saw everywhere in Iran, especially toward the relics of pre-Islamic civilizations. The Parsi emissary blamed all Iranians (Zoroastrian or not) for forgetting their ancient heritage. In addition to blaming what appeared to be a communal amnesia, Hataria considered the seventh-century Arab conquest of Iran as a catastrophic event for Iran and its Zoroastrian population. Hataria criticized the Arabs so persistently and with such passion that to him in the panorama of Persian antiquity the Arabs were like the arch enemies of the Zoroastrian sovereigns of Iran. "Most of the monuments and palaces were destroyed by the Arabs," Hataria believed. "They were either broken down or burnt. The great library, which was a treasure house of ancient culture and literature, was burnt by the Arabs."[496]

Thus, of ruined monuments in various parts of Iran convinced Hataria that they "testif[ied] to the ancient Iranian glory."[497] The more Hataria sympathized with Iran's lost glory the more exasperated he became with the Arabs who, according to him, brought that glory to an end. As a result, remarks on the magnificence of Iran's ancient glory almost always led to explosive observations on the destructive nature of Arab conquest of Iran: "The sight of all these provide testimony to the power of the evil Arab sword."[498]

Narratives of decline are usually predicated on an idealized state that is hopelessly buried in the distant past. This type of narrative considers "human history as a tale of

[496] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

[497] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 64.

[498] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 64.

steady decay and moral deterioration. It looks back to an idealized Golden Age – timeless and perfect – which the chaotic forces of evil, greed, hatred, and violence have destroyed.[499] Hataria drew on ancient Zoroastrians lore in an effort to demonstrate the underpinnings of the golden age he evinced in the pre-Islamic Iran. According to him,

> The ancient Zoroastrians, who lived within the boundaries of Iran, called the country *Iran-Mino Nishan* (sign of heaven) because of its pleasant climate and the fertility of its soil. Iran is also known as *Baag-e-Behesht* (garden of paradise) because of its unique climate.[500]

The salubrious climate increased crops and agriculture. At the same time, it also increased piety and observation of religious rituals among the people in ancient Iran:

> Moreover, in those happy and prosperous days of Iran, the inhabitants observed the rules of piety and purity of body, mind and soul. There were no superstitious beliefs and thus they could live a long and healthy life.[501]

What came to Iran with the Arab conquest turned the foregoing paradisiacal picture into a chaos of apocalyptic proportions. To Hataria, the Arab onslaught had global ramifications, affecting both the land and its people:

> When the country went into the hands of the Muslims, hordes of Arabs, Mongols, Tartars and other barbaric tribes overran the country causing destruction and devastation everywhere. Robbers and dacoits destroyed our ancient temples, palaces and valuable libraries and other important monuments.[502]

As an antiquarian, Hataria was sure enough to point out the immediate consequence of Arab invasion of Iran as it affected the magnificent edifices of pre-Islamic Iran.

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[499] Silberman, "The Tyranny of Narrative," 177.

[500] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

[501] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

[502] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 2," 34.

According to him, the Arabs came in "hoards" to loot the rich empire, never thinking about taking care of its monuments. The destruction they brought with them shook the core foundations of Zoroastrian Iran. It is interesting to note that the buildings Hataria mentioned above symbolized the core institutions of Persian society – religion, politics and education – and sustained its intellectual vigor over the ages. As an antiquarian, the ruins of pre-Islamic monuments spoke of the fall of a glorious empire whose "arts and industries" were "unsurpassed in the annals of history."[503]

The Arabs were not only blamed by Hataria for destroying the magnificent edifices of pre-Islamic Iran. As we learn from his recently published letters, Hataria entertained highly negative sentiments toward the Arabs. Posing as an anthropologist, the Parsi emissary considered the Arab civilization as inherently inferior to the Persian civilization. This is how he envisioned the Arab conquerors:

> These hoards were totally illiterate and uncultured and forced Islam upon the people at the point of the sword. They brought nothing but poverty and ruin. The slaughter of thousands of people led to the spread of various contagious diseases. The natural beauty of the country and the healthy atmosphere became things of the past.[504]

According to Hataria, the Arabs looted and destroyed the Persian Empire since they came from a purportedly inferior culture that had taught them nothing else. Following this line of argument, Hataria entertained some of the most unabashed anti-Arab commentary we could find in a nineteenth-century history of the invasion of Iran by Arab Muslims. Thus, in the same way that the salubrious climate of ancient Iran had

[503] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

[504] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

brought prosperity to the land and piety to the hearts of ancient Zoroastrians, the Muslim invasion manifested its negative impact both on the land and its people:

> Under the tyrannical rule of the Muslim Sultans, the number of dacoits and robbers increased; men forgot their human characteristics and behaved like senseless brutes. Family happiness departed and the "Garden of Paradise" turned into the most veritable hell.[505]

In what followed, the Arabs took the blame for almost anything that was wrong with Iran at Hataria's time. Lamenting the widespread illiteracy he saw among his coreligionists, Hataria again blamed the Arabs for this unfortunate situation. In fact, according to Hataria, the "fear of Arab tyranny" forced the Zoroastrians to live in caves for years with almost no communication with the rest of the world. "After the Arab occupation," Hataria wrote, "education had suffered" in Iran since,

> The Arabs were semi-barbaric tribes who had no culture of their own and did not know the value of education. Old madressas, teaching Avesta, Pahlavi and Persian, were destroyed by the invaders. Consequently the Zoroastrians who remained in Iran had no scope for education; their children could not learn Avesta or Pahlavi and Persian languages and consequently their religious knowledge was wanting. They were forced to learn Arabic instead.[506]

The Arabs, in Hataria's view, stood in total contradistinction to the ancient Persians. Judging from the craftsmanship of the monuments the latter had left behind, the antiquarian Hataria posited the idea that the ancient Iranian,

> […] had various arts and crafts which provided them with their livelihood. Their trading activities were boundless. They traded with the countries of the East and the West and always kept good relations with others. On the whole the Iranians were peace-loving people; but when occasion required it, they fought to the finish. In art and architecture also they were pioneers. Their edifices, buildings, palaces,

[505] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 60.

[506] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 6," 14.

> forts and other monuments were not built of bricks, stones and mortar, with wood and iron as is done today. They were mostly carved in mountains, particularly at great heights.[507]

Observations like the above convinced Hataria that "the ancient Iranians were far superior and civilized than the people of today."[508] The Arabs, on the other hand, were driven by nothing but brutality and bloodshed. So, in addition to mindlessly destroying the magnificent edifices of pre-Islamic Iran, they mass slaughtered the indigenous Zoroastrian population of Iran. Episodes such as the following recur in Hataria's text with certain frequently:

> When the Arabs got their sway over Iran, the Zoroastrians were slaughtered mercilessly, their houses were burnt down and they were robbed of their valuables and other belongings. Rape, arson, fire, house-breaking and all other possible crimes were perpetrated by the Muslims. There was unspeakable cruelty. One can well imagine their sorry plight […].[509]

Hataria systematically projected the qualities he found in contemporary Iranians onto an imagined entity he called "the Arabs." This was how the angry Parsi manufactured the identity of the Arab "other" that stood in contradistinction to the Persians. As we shall see in the following sections, successive generations of writers engaged in inventing the character of the unflinching, bloodthirsty "Arab" we find in modern Persian literature. Layers of ideological sediment were deposited on the palimpsestic character of "the Arabs" turning them into the ultimate "other".

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[507] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 63.

[508] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 63.

[509] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 2," 34.

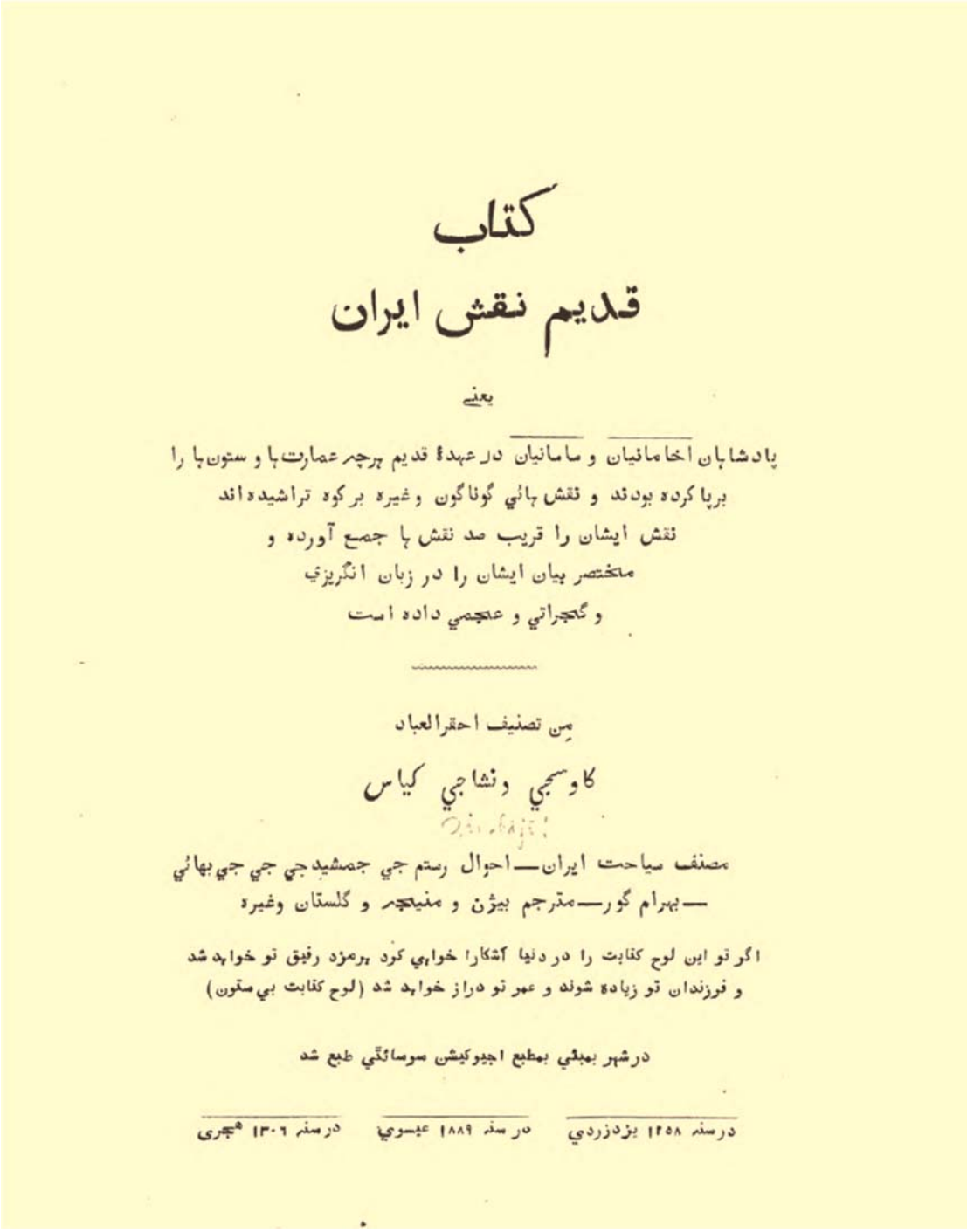
Parsi Publications Reiterating Hataria

Hataria's trip to Iran inspired the Parsis to publish a number of "antiquarian guides" to ancient sites and locations in Iran. Some of these publications included *Ancient Persian Sculptures* (1889) by Kavasji Dinshaw Kiash, *Irān ane Irākmā Musāfari* (1922) by Cooverbai Manockji Dhalla, *Māri Mumbai Bahārni Sehel* (1926) Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, and Rustom Kharegat's *Tourist Guide to Iran* (1935).[510]

Kiash's trilingual *Ancient Persian Sculptures* (1889) featured brief descriptions of ancient sites in Iran along with sketches of bas-reliefs and inscriptions. Kiash's work is among the earliest attempts by the Parsis of India to continue Hataria's project of reclaiming the ancient ruins of Iran as Zoroastrian in origin. In doing so, Kiash revealed how the Parsis of India were in fact under the influence of European Orientalism as they deployed the findings of European sciences of archaeology and anthropology in an effort to shape their worldview.

From a lexical standpoint, the first thing attracting attention is scarcity of technical jargon in Kiash's Persian sections. Lack of adequate Persian terminology can arguably reveal the incipient nature of antiquarianism in some Persian speaking communities at this time since the many archaeological terms Kiash utilized in his descriptions in English were loosely "translated" into Persian. In the Persian paragraphs, even the names of historical figures were transliterations of their English equivalents. Thus, "Cyrus," "the Achaemenians" and "the Medians" were transliterated in the Persian text as *Sāiros*,

[510] Sheffield, "Iran, the Mark of Paradise or the Land of Ruin," 37.



کتاب

قدیم نقش ایران

یعنے

پادشاہان اخامانیان و سامانیان در عہدۂ قدیم ہرچہر عمارت ہا و ستون ہا را
برپا کردہ بودند و نقش ہائي گوناگون وغیرہ برکوہ تراشیدہ اند
نقش ایشان را قریب صد نقش ہا جمع آوردہ و
مختصر بیان ایشان را در زبان انگریزي
و گجراتي و عجمي دادہ است

من تصنیف احقرالعباد

کاوسجي دنشاجي کیاس

مصنف سیاحت ایران — احوال رستم جي جمشیدجي جي جي بھائي
— بہرام گور — مترجم بیژن و منیجہر و گلستان وغیرہ

اگر تو این لوح کتابت را در دنیا آشکارا خواہي کرد ہرمزد رفیق تو خواہد شد
و فرزندان تو زیادہ شونہ و عمر تو دراز خواہد شد (لوح کتابت بي ستون)

درشہر بمبئي بمطبع اجیوکیشن سوسائٹي طبع شد

درسنہ ۱۲۵۸ یزدزردي — درسنہ ۱۸۸۹ عیسوي — درسنہ ۱۳۰۶ ھجری

Picture 14: Kiash's Persian title page (1889)

Akhāmāniān, and *Mīdīā*, respectively.[511] (In modern Persian usage, these are translated as *Sirūs*, *Hakhāmaneshiyān* and *Mād*, respectively.)

Kiash's Persian was also unready to capture the many archaeological details he invoked in his English descriptions. Terms such as *bas-relief*, *inscription* and *statute* needed to be paraphrased (instead of translated) as *lowh-e ketābat* (lit. "written panel"), *mehrāb-naghsh* (lit. "alter decoration" or *mehrāb-e monaqqash* [lit. "decorated alter"]) and *sūrat-e sangi* (lit. "face in stone"), respectively.[512] Thus, nuanced archaeological information was nearly impossible to interpret into Persian and was literally lost in translation. Thus, observations such as "plate bears no inscription" lost their edge and simply became *mehrāb bedūn-e lowh-e ketābat ast* (lit. "alter is without written panel").[513] It is interesting to note that such a key term as *monument* had no equivalence in Persian at the time; therefore, Kiash had to draw on a number of Persian words to capture the archaeological significance of that term. Persian language was not equipped with appropriate lexicon to redress this situation. As a result, a phrase such as "plundering the palace and destroying its monuments" was rendered by Kiash in a general language as *ʿalāmat-hā-i ke az ū yādegār būdand ū rā virān kard* (lit. "he destroyed the signs that he left behind").[514] Another term was "monument" which was vaguely translated into "sign," capturing the antiquity of the English term.

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[511] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 2.

[512] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 2. In another place, a more ambiguous term was used for bas-relief: *ʿalāmat-hā* (lit. "signs").

[513] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 223.

[514] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 2.

Kiash's Persian shared certain affinities with the language Bāqir Kermānshāhānī used for translating Hataria's travel narrative in 1865. Published nearly two decades earlier in Mumbai, Kermānshāhānī's translation employed a similarly nontechnical Persian to render Hataria's antiquarian descriptions of pre-Islamic monuments. Phrases such as the following may be found in the Persian translation of Hataria's narrative frequently: *sūrat-e pādeshāhān-e salaf va lowh-e khatt-e qadim* (lit. "the picture of prior kings and tablet of old script") which was a rendition of the *bas-reliefs* and *inscriptions* of pre-Islamic kings.[515] In other places, these two terms were rendered as *tasāvir va ʿalāmāt-e salātin-e salaf* (lit. "pictures and signs of ancestral kings").[516]

A final example we can add here involved the English word "ancient" which was rendered in the Persian translation of Hataria's work as either *qadim* or *kohneh* (both literally meaning "old"). For example, reference to pre-Islamic numismatic evidence was rendered in the Persian version as *sekkeh-ye qadim* (lit. "old coin").[517] This can help us argue that during the time Hataria's travel narrative was translated (1865) the Persian did not follow the tradition of the *Shāhnāmeh* (1010) as the word *bāstān* ("ancient") was used in Ferdowsi's work.

Kiash endeavored to reassemble traces of ancient worship found in Iran into a complete picture of that faith in the antiquity. Investigating ruined fire temples and depictions of fire altars in rock reliefs, Kiash observed that the religion of ancient kings of Iran was nothing but Zoroastrianism. According to him, public displays of fire alters in a

[515] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 27.

[516] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 26.

[517] Hataria, *Resāleh-ye Ezhār-e Siyāhat-e Irān*, 29.

bas-relief in Persepolis was meant to show "in what manner [Darrius] observed the ritual of the Zoroastrian religion." In addition to revealing Darrius' religion, the bas-relief represented him as a monotheist: "he stood before the fire-altars worshipping God."[518]

The project of *reclaiming* Iran's monuments as Zoroastrian in origin led Kiash to make observations on the historical causality that brought about their ruined conditions. Drawing on an account by Herodotus, about the legendary magnificence of the Median city of Ecbatana, Kiash lamented the city's present-day ruin as, "[n]othing is to be seen now of this grandeur and pomp but a few heaps of stones [and] two plates of cuneiform inscriptions."[519] To the Parsi writer, the detritus consumed all ancient cities: "In like manner Susa and Babylon were decorated, but of these, as of the other cities, alas! the sun of their glory and magnificence has set behind the dark hills of pre-historical obscurity."[520]

Calls for liberating the pre-Islamic past from its Islamic shell became the order of the day in 1920s when Reza Shah came to power. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, in his coronation speech, the new monarch purported to "witness" the splendor of pre-Islamic Iran from beyond the "historians' bias" by scrutinizing the material remains of the ancient past. Reza Shah's call for action can be studied vis-à-vis Kiash's wish to do away with the "obscurity" he believed was veiling the pre-Islamic Iran as he examined Zoroastrian legacy of his ancestral country.

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[518] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 6-7.

[519] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 8-9.

[520] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 9.

To Kiash, the "Mahomedan conquest" was responsible for the demise of Iran's pre-Islamic glory. Weakened by endless Greek wars and belabored by internal strife, Kiash argued, the Persian Empire was left "at a sad disadvantage to withstand the overwhelming forces of the conquering Arab hordes."[521] The Arab "invaders," according to Kiash, seized the power and "indulged in their taste for plunder and destruction to its fullest extent."[522] For the antiquarian Kiash, "[p]alaces, monuments, [and] public buildings" suffered greatest damage after the Arab dominion as "all fell a prey to their [the Arabs'] vandalism."[523] Thus, reiterating Hataria, the Arabs were marked by the purported atrocities they committed against the monuments of ancient Iran. In the years to come, the ideological proximity of the Arabs to the cherished ruins of pre-Islamic Iran was preserved. The *topos* of Arabs destroying ancient Iran's monuments was systematically deployed in the repertoire of nationalist texts written in the 1920s and 1930s.

The few ruins Kiash could identify in Iran filled him with "bitter reflections" about the diminishing glory of his ancestral country. He blamed the religion of the Arabs for bringing that glory to an end:

> It is saddening indeed to think that this list is not a tithe even of the monumental glories of Old Persia, which but for the destroying arm of the conqueror, wielded

[521] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 22.

[522] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 23.

[523] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 23.

> with all the fiery zeal of fanaticism and religious hatred, might have been standing at this present time.[524]

The harshest criticism Kiash levied on the Arab "invaders" was pronounced in the Preface of his book. With these words Kiash started his book:

> The very scanty remains of palaces, fire-temples, and mural pictorial records, which with difficulty survived the terrible Arab invasion of Persia in the year 632 ad, are all that is left to us of the grandeur and glory which belonged to the ancient Monarchy and Religion that swayed the once all-powerful kingdom of ancient Persia. In the fierce onrush of those fanatical hordes, all that was likely to perpetuate the memory of the prowess or religious observances of the conquered race was ruthlessly destroyed.[525]

To the Parsi writer, religious intolerance of the Arabs was even more destructive than the forces of nature. The "fierce onrush" of Arabs erased the memory of the Zoroastrian. To Kiash, "the all-effacing hand of time" worked hand in hand with "ignorant and wanton destructiveness of fanaticism" in order to destroy the icons of Zoroastrian political and religious might: *palaces* and *fire-temples.*

Kiash's remarks on the difficulties of conducting antiquarian research in Iran bring to mind Hataria's woeful observations on the difficulties of exploration of the country in the nineteenth century. For Hataria, doing antiquarian study in Iran *under Arab rule* was a "Himalayan task." If not impossible to do, it was fraught with great dangers:

> To travel in many parts of Iran was not safe under the Arab rule. Permission was required for going from province to province and their spies and soldiers follow

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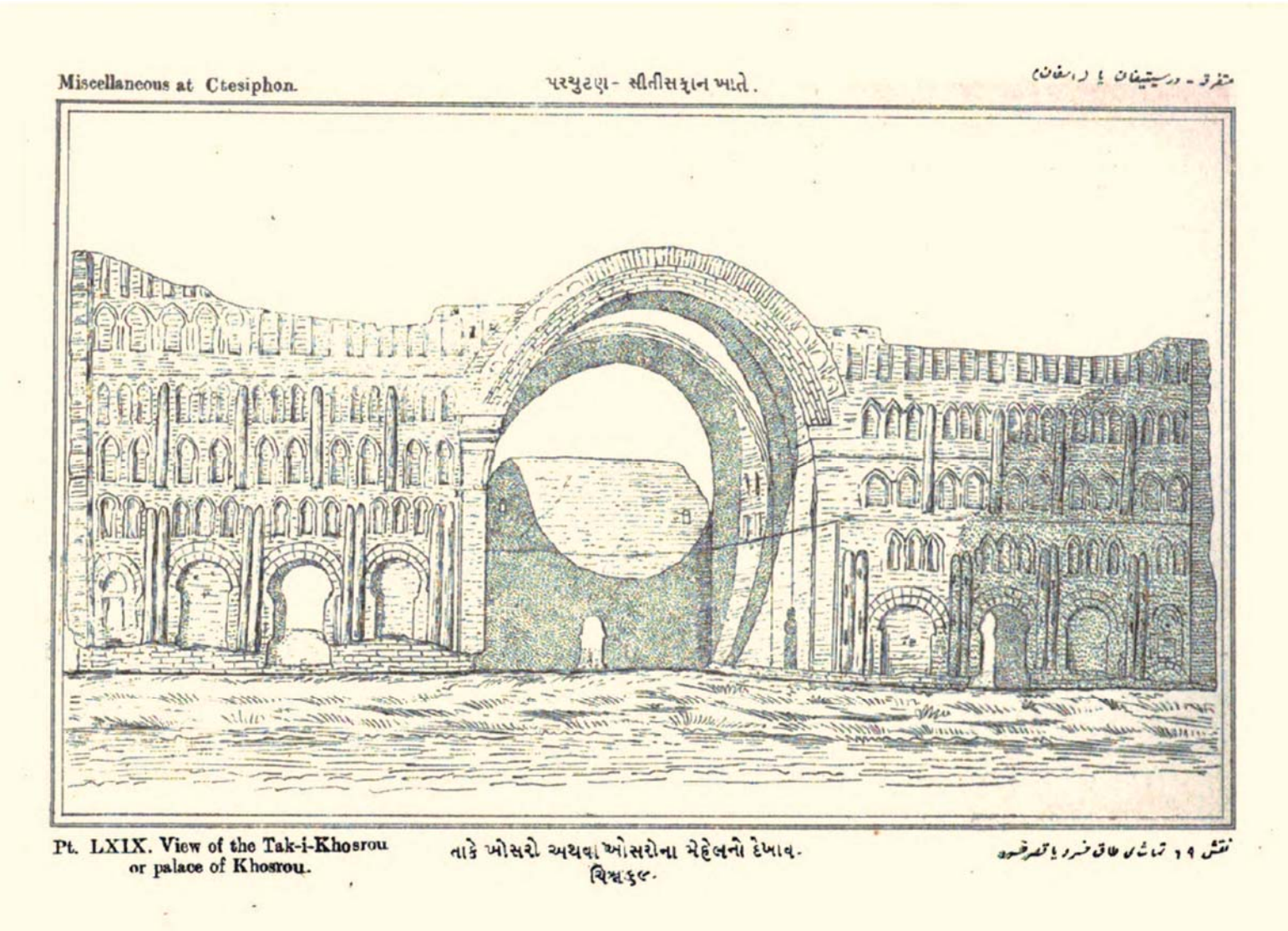
[524] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, 26. The "fanaticism" Kiash found in the religion of the Arabs was against the message of Zoroastrianism. According to him, the idea of "good deeds and noble actions" was imprinted on every relic of pre-Islamic Iran with "the noble art of sculpture" – something the Arabs destroyed when they invaded Persia.

[525] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, i.



Picture 15: Illustration of Ctesiphon by Kiash (1889)

> the travellers and watch their movements and note down their conversation. The traveller had to be on guard all the time. No arms were allowed to be carried.[526]

As we learn from European travelers to Iran, such dangers were common and arguably increased the value of their findings for them. Kiash's will to defy the "difficulties and dangers surrounding a journey through the wilds of modern Persia" could be studied vis-à-vis the claims Hataria made about this topic in his travel narrative.[527] In addition to complaining about inhospitable conditions, Kiash had reservations about the credibility of the information indigenous people in Iran provided him. As he warned in his Preface, such information was "of a vague unreliable character generally, and should be accepted with strict caution."[528] In addition to mobilizing the antiquarian findings of European travelers and explorers, Kiash found his work's point of departure in *Manfred* (1817), a romantic closet drama by the nineteenth-century British poet, Lord Byron.

Boman Desai: Ancient Trauma Made Modern

With the phenomenal success of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), the Indo-English novel is believed to have found new relevance in the 1980s.[529] Rushdie's larger-than-life protagonist and magical realistic narrative inspired a wave of novels that engaged the

[526] Hataria, "Travels in Iran: 1," 63.

[527] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, i.

[528] Kiash, *Ancient Persian Sculptures*, ii.

[529] Rege, "Victim into Protagonist? *Midnight's Children* and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties" 171.

national memories of the Indian people in tales of mythic proportion.[530] Boman Desai's well-known Parsi novel, *The Memory of Elephants* (1988), belongs to this wave of novels. What makes Desai's novel important for my study is his drawing on the history of the Parsi people in order to construct their identity as a historically aggrieved community in India. The traumatic history Desai mobilized in his book pivoted around the seventh-century invasion of Persia by the Arab Muslims. As I explained in the previous sections, the foundational text of the Parsi community in India, *Qesseh-ye Sanjān* (The Story of Sanjān [1599]) by Bahman Keyqobād, played a seminal role in giving coherence to the dispersed Zoroastrians who had fled Iran after the Arab Muslims invaded it. It was arguably through this text that the legacy of the trauma Desai mobilized in his novel was kept alive for centuries.

In the following pages, I will try to show how the trauma of narratives of early encounter between the Persians and the Arab Muslims was mobilized by Boman Desai to piece together the mythic character of his Parsi protagonist, Hormus Seervai. The *memory machine* (or "memoscan") the Parsi protagonist of the novel created in order to replay his past memories, reveal how he is still haunted by the memories of persecution by the invading Arab Muslims. Desai's novel tends to rehearse the highly antagonistic representation of Arabs we find in early historiographical works such as *Tarikh al-Rosol*

[530] The other important novels include: Namita Gokhale's *Paro, Dreams of Passion*; Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*; Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* and *The Last Burden*; Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama* and *Hero*; Boman, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and *Show Business*; and Nina Sibal's *Yatra*. See Rege, "Victim into Protagonist?," 171.

wa al-Molūk (History of the Prophets and Kings) by the well-known Arab historian, Abū Jaʿfar Mohammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabari (838-923). This latter work, like the *Shāhnāmeh* (Book of Kings, 1010) by Abul-Qāsem Ferdowsi, is a compilation of narratives of early encounter between the Persians and the Arabs, featuring information about their day-to-day interactions, negotiations and the manner their conducted their wars.

The moving images of the Arabs that projected on the screen of the memory machine ("memoscan") connected to Hormus' brain are a modern iteration of age-old images I have discussed in the previous chapters. Desai's appropriating a metaphor from the apparatus of cinema modernized those age-old images by floating the Arabs in a cinematic virtual reality. Desai's protagonist, Hormus Seervai, is the living memory of the Parsi community; in the same way Salim Sinai was the living embodiment of India. In his mental forays, Hormus floats in time and space, accessing historical data he never thought he knew. Using the memoscan, he was able to examine his memories "shot by shot" as if he was rewinding a recorded film of those memories.

The section I have in mind started with recollection of a lovemaking. Dazed by the beauty of his American girlfriend, Hormus was convinced that she was not an ordinary girl but "a woman of the silver screen and golden celebrity as much as Jane Fonda, Doris Day, or Anita Ekberg."[531] As we learn, Hormus went through his memories frequently, developing the habit of replaying the memories of his date: "I had lost count of the number of times I have watched Candace take off her clothes, but she'd taken off her

[531] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 2.

clothes for me just once."[532] For Hormus, the unchanging order of his mental snapshots made them look like a recorded movie: "It was as if I were seeing a movie, a movie I had seen so many times that could trace its progression as it with a template."[533] It is with the memoscan that he could play and replay this single "scene" countless times, prolonging the joy of his rendezvous with the American girl.

At the middle of one of these sessions, the normal sequence of images was unpredictably disrupted when Hormus found "a desert" outside of his window. The picture that emerged was so vivid that he could even feel the desert heat coming out of the window! Looking at it carefully Hormus found this:

> I saw Arabs mounted on camels, their swirling white haiks dirty with the desert billowing like sails behind them, appearing through the heathaze like a mirage, tall and slender and shimmering, congealing before my eyes into figures painted by El Greco, sculpted by Giacometti.[534]

What perplexed Hormus was how the Arabs could occur side-by-side his undressed girlfriend in his room. When finally the image of the Arabs and that of his girlfriend started becoming one and the same thing, the Parsi student started losing his mind: "When the images began to merge, my command finally slipped away and I surrendered to the madness."[535] The deeply perplexing experience was like "hallucination" for Hormus since it started a phantasmagoria of the dead walking side-by-side the living (members of

[532] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 3.

[533] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 3-4.

[534] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 3.

[535] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 4.

his family) "as if they were acting out the scenes of their lives by my bedside."[536] What frightened him most was the hostility that was implied in the mental picture of the Arabs:

> I saw armies, hordes and phalanxes of warriors, Arabs and Iranis, on foot, on horseback, camelback, elephantback, emerged in battle, showers of descending arrows, a constant swarm of adverse activity as might be witnessed when rival ant colonies or galaxies collide.[537]

Examining the developing action as if it was a recorded film, Hormus commented on the manner the ancient spectacle was *cinematically realized*: "Sometimes the images appeared in closeup as if through a zoom lens, sometimes from afar as if through a wide angle, in short bites of motion as if in a badly edited movie, all to the accompaniment of a relentless atonal symphony."[538] The size of objects in Hormus' memory snapshots tend to reflect the freshness or the urgency of recollected memories. A close-up, for example, signifies a foregrounded memory object; while a "wide angle" tend to reveal a vaguely recollected memory. As I shall explain in the following paragraphs, the "badly edited movie" of Hormus' mnemonic snapshots can be used as a useful metaphor for explaining the juxtaposition of disparate images in Hormus' mind – as well as in Boman Desai's book.

The *tableau* of the camel-riding Arab gradually started to acquire historical detail. In the story that unfolds, we meet the Arabs arriving at the Persian camp for conducting negotiations that would lead to the traumatic conquest of Persia in the seventh century CE. Since this particular historical juncture was the first time the two people met each

[536] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 4.

[537] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 4.

[538] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 5.

other face to face and on equal terms – because of the rising status of the Arabs under Islam – the Arabs who entered Ctesiphon were heavily scrutinized by the curious Persians. One of the first things attracting the latter's attention was the Arabs' physical features. Nothing can escape the narrator's penetrating gaze:

> The Arabs commanded their camels to their knees and sprang off unwrapping the white flap of cloth across their faces. They were hardier, bred in the desert, than the Iranis, taller with gaunt faces, sand encrusted stubble, thin noses like beaks, and eyes narrowed by continual squinting against the wind and the sun; the space around the eyes was more wrinkled and darker like a mask owing to the lesser protection provided the eye by their cowls.[539]

The narrator's occasionally depreciating gaze reveal the anxiety the Persians felt when they first met the Arab emissaries. The Persian guards tend to notice how the latter's physical features are different from theirs. This is how an old sentry is said to have noticed this apparent fact:

> […] the old Irani sentry was struck immediately by their difference from the Arabs he had known, a skulking subservient nomadic people, lacking culture, lacking education, barely above the rats of the desert upon which they fed, but those bedouin walked as if they were nobility, as if they were conquerors (faces as smug as the faces of their camels), as if the Iranis were lackeys.[540]

Even with these few memory snapshots we can perhaps argue that Hormus' unconscious tends to follow the ideology of certain anti-Arab texts where the Arabs are cast as the "other" of the Persian people. In the latter texts, the Arabs are imagined as ethnically and racially distinct from and inferior to the Persians. Descriptions of differing physical features oftentimes lead to tropes of animalization. They are present in Hormus'

[539] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 7.

[540] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 8.

unconscious as well: the Arabs' are portrayed as having "thin noses like beaks" and their mode of sustenance is said to reflect the inferior status of their culture – "a skulking subservient nomadic people, lacking culture, lacking education, barely above the rats of the desert upon which they fed." The animalization of Arabs continue in the historical sections of Desai's novel as his narrator constantly denigrated the Arabs for their purportedly inferior physical features which would refute their legitimacy for conquering the Persian Empire.

In Hormus' unconsciousness, the ancient Persians are painted in absolute contrast to the Arabs. In his memory snapshot, the "sleek and oliveskinned" residents of Ctesiphon are "men in colorful blouses open down the front fastened by girdles and breeches reaching their knees, the women dressed similarly but in longer wider garments with blouses closed down the front except for a slit at the breast."[541] Perhaps not surprisingly, the Persians are said to have "gathered to make fun of the curved scimitars of the Arabs, their dirty burnooses, weatherbeaten features. Someone suggested, to the crowd's immense amusement, that they acquire new clothes, make distaffs of their bows and spin flax."[542]

Even though on the previous page we read that the Arab emissaries entered "the city of Madayn" (the Arabic name of Ctesiphon), yet description of the "sumptuous" city palace appears to include details belonging to the Achaemenian palace of Persepolis.

[541] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 9.

[542] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 9.

Pausing the narrative temporarily, the gaze of the narrator is averted to the spectacular details of the palace:

> The entire face of its main staircase was covered with sculptures in low relief, of Irani guards, armed with spears, swords, shields, others carrying bows and quiversful of arrows, lions attacking bulls, hunting parties, mythological beasts combining lions and bulls and eagles and men, and more.[543]

Bringing to mind the archaeological descriptions of Parsi writers like Kiash, the sumptuousness of the palace at Ctesiphon is assembled from archaeological details belonging to certain ancient monuments. Using the "badly edited movie" metaphor, the splendor of the pre-Islamic palace at Ctesiphon for Hormus is literally a combination of different archaeological details. The "badly edited" quality of such *palimpsestic* formations reveal the "free-floating" quality of the ancient memories in recollected snapshots in Hormus' mind.

The meeting between the Arab emissaries and the Persian king provoke another wave of negative sentiments toward the Arabs. As the tension grew between the two parties, the animadversion increased toward Arabs as well. For example, after receiving the Arab emissaries, the first thing the Persian king noticed about them was their "beggarly raiment" despite their "regal bearing." In his mind, the Persian king thought of them as nothing "more than jackals harassing an old lion."[544]

The historical information Hormus can access through his memoscan paints an idealistic picture of the glories of the ancient past. For example, in another pause in the narrative we are informed about the glories of the ancient past:

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[543] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 9.

[544] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 10.

> The Iranis were known for their humanity; vanquished kings were dealt with honorably. Enemy towns were left unmolested. Their ranks welcomed into the service of Iran, and land given to administrate. Zoroastrianism was the religion of the royal house of Iran, but Judaism, Christianity, and even paganism were tolerated with equanimity.[545]

The Arab culture and civilization, on the other hand, are embodiments of everything that if left out above. Infuriated by the audacity of the Arab emissaries, the Persian king threatened them that Iran,

> will drive you deep into the desert again with the rats and the snakes upon which you feed. You have been known to bury your daughters to avoid sharing food with them, you have been known to feed on carcasses and drink blood. Of all the world's nations you are the poorest, the least united, the most ignorant, the most estranged from the arts.[546]

Previously, Hormus had expressed his inability to explain how he possibly could know the detailed historical information he discovered in his memory by using the memoscan. Questioning himself "How did I know this?" only produced an acquiescent response from him: "Do not ask; I was not in control; I was learning."[547] He gave a similar response when the "movie" of the meeting between the Arab emissaries and the Persian king come to an end in his mind: "Yesyes, verynice, palace and throne and crown and everything; suitably impressed I was though still full of incomprehension."[548] Therefore, when he overhears a doctor diagnosing his "damaged memory," Hormus asks himself: "My memory? damaged? I was recalling things I didn't even know I knew – in vivid detail!"[549]

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[545] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 11.

[546] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 12.

[547] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 7.

[548] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 13.

[549] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 18.

As we learn later-on, Hormus' Parsi grandmother, Banu Dhondi (Bapaiji), was in charge of connecting him to the historical spectacle Hormus "witnessed" through his memoscan. As Bapaiji explained: "Look, and maybe my big brain, little mind, lost in America, American grandson will at least learn something."[550]

In addition to introducing Hormus to a repository of anti-Arab representations, Bapaiji taught him to take pride in the Persians' victories over them. For example, at a critical moment during the war, the manner two Arabs were killed was narrated to Hormus with certain patriotic feeling. This is how the Sasanian general, Rostam Farrokhzād, bravely fought the invading Arabs:

> Two mounted Arabs squeezed Rustom's mount between them. One held him so the other might find a vantage point for his blade, but Rustom spurred his horse forward breaking the first Arab's hold, held his shield against the second Arab's scimitar, and swiped backward with his sword slicing the first Arab's face from the crown to the chin. Someone else swung at the second Arab so that his head flew through the air with wide white bulging eyes. Rustom smiled, nodding a quick acknowledgment to his compatriot.[551]

The killing of Rostam Farrokhzād finally brought the ultimate doom to the Persians. Two months after his death, the sight of Arabs passing a river to enter Persian lands filled the people of Ctesiphon with dread. In his memory snapshots, Hormus witnessed these traumatic events with particular vividness: "When the guards saw the Arabs they ran through the city shouting, 'The devils have come! The followers of Ahriman have come!'"[552] With the Persian king fleeing to the east, the gates of the Persian Empire were

[550] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 14.

[551] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 15.

[552] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 16.

left open to the invading Arabs. Horrific episodes of looting and mass murder are standard here:

> Madayn fell after token resistance and the wealth of Iran passed into Arab hands – carpets, arms, jewels, a horse of pure gold. Fifty thousand Arabs, many of whom had never seen gold before, never lived in more than tent, wandered as if in a dream through the palaces and gardens whatever they wished.[553]

After "witnessing" ancient spectacles such as the above in terrifying detail, Hormus found it hard to believe that his long-term memory was damaged. To him, the grand historical scenes that were replayed in his mind were the long-term memory they thought was damaged. Stage-managed by his grandmother, Hormus' mind systematically was injected with negative sentiments toward the Arab Muslims who forced the Parsis to leave their homeland. Sometimes, the historical information was meant to *indoctrinate* the Parsi protagonist in the trauma of his people's forced migration to India. This is one of those moments:

> […] and what are Parsis but the people driven from their homeland to India by the Arabs? The Europeans called the homeland Persia, and the province Parsa, to represent the whole of Iran, and it wasn't until 1935 that the Europeans began calling Persia by her true name, Iran, land of the Aryans, at the request of the Iranian government, but by then it had been too long the home of the Arabs, nonAryans of nonIran, desertrats, the Mussalman as we Parsis call them.[554]

A full page of the novel is dedicated to listing the humiliations the indigenous Zoroastrian population had to experience when their country fell under Arab Muslims rule. Lack of religious freedom and debilitating restrictions against the Zoroastrians characterize the Islamic-era Iran. In Bapaiji's words, the Zoroastrians "were not allowed

[553] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 17-18.

[554] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 19.

to ride, carry weapons, drink wine openly, show signs of their religion, wear Mussulman clothing, speak to Mussulman women, not build houses taller than Mussulman houses."[555] These words were followed by a "movie" in Hormus' mind that showed ancient ships carrying away the Persian Empire's riches with "underbellies fill[ed] with gold."

Toward the end of the book's Epilogue, the historical episodes start invading the real world, creating hallucinatory sequences. For example, looking at the picture of a ship on the wall of his room, Hormus saw how it started floating out of its frame, sailing into turbulent storm. The spectacle is so real that Hormus found himself caught at the middle of a gaping vortex of storm with water slapping the floor around him. As it turns out, the ships caught in a storm, and their safe landing in India *allegorized* the travails of the fleeing Zoroastrians from Persia to Sanjān, India. The fishing village of Sanjān is described in paradisiacal terms – the exact opposite of the hell (Iran under Arab rule) they escaped from. Wary of their surroundings and the dangers it may have in store for them, the Zoroastrians were startled how the local Indians graciously took them in: "the first canoes greeted them like heroes with hosannas, flowers, coconut milk, invited them ashore, and provided shelter and food, a feast of rice, fish curry, and toddy."[556] The foregoing episode was so unexpected and abrupt for Hormus that he felt "as if someone had edited a strip out of a movie reel."[557] The *enlightened* Parsi felt that if he told anybody

[555] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 19.

[556] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 21.

[557] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 20.

about the scenes and spectacles he watched, they "might have been interpreted as a relapse into dementia."[558]

The novel comes to an end with the local ruler, Jadhav Rana, officially receiving the new comers. Like what we find in *Qesseh-ye Sanjān*, which has become the canonical version of this episode, the Zoroastrians were granted asylum only after they promised to accept certain condition set by the local ruler which facilitated their peaceful integration into the local Hindu culture. In this way, Hormus' getting back to "secure surroundings" (his birthplace Mumbai) tend to allegorize the sea voyage of the fleeing Zoroastrians.

[558] Desai, *The Memory of Elephants*, 21.

Conclusion: the Afterlife of "Savage" Arabs

On March 22, 1926, Iran's Poet Laurette, Mohammad Taqi Bahār (1886-1951), celebrated the Persian New Year at the Pahlavi court by reading a long didactic poem titled *Chahār Khetābeh* ("Four Epistles"). Glorifying the benevolence of just kings, the poet lauded the newly crowned Reza Shah (*r.* 1925-1941) as an ideal ruler and reviver of ancient Zoroastrian traditions. The didactic poem had some word of advice for the new monarch as well. Here we can find an exceptional example of a balanced and egalitarian outlook toward the Arabs, which seems to be poles apart from the controversial material I investigated in this dissertation.

Bahār starts the second epistle of his poem with a praise for early Persian dynasties whose legacy he posits to go back to the Sasanian Empire in the pre-Islamic times. Once the founders of the Persian nation are recognized, we learn about the calamities it had to endure throughout the ages to be reborn under the Pahlavi regime. Successive waves of invasion by certain "foreigners" (*ajnabiān*), Bahār tells us, left the nation at the mercy of an "ilk" (*ferqeh*) of plunderers whose sole creed was "to take and to steal and to flee."[559] Although the Arabs are also mentioned among this group of invaders, yet the way the poet describes them sets them apart from the Turks, Mughals and Turkmen whose atrocities he denounces in vehement terms:

> No words can convey Mughals' oppression;
> They are not worthy of description either.
> Mughals were unsurpassed animals!

[559] Bahār, *Divān-e Ashʿār-e Mohammad Taqi Bahār* (Anthology of Poetry by Mohammad Taqi Bahār) ed. Malekzādeh, 801.

Compared with Mughals, the Arabs were like Gabriel!
Arabs at least had mercy and compassion;
knew about camaraderie, love and equality.
Though Arabs raided us like highwaymen,
they bestowed upon us a beloved religion.
Though we suffered from the Caliphs' oppression,
we learned about the wisdom of Ali's descendants.

Zolm-e Moqol qābel-e goftār nist,
sharh-e vei albatteh sezāvār nist.
Būd Moqol jānevari bi-badīl,
pīsh-e Moqol, ʿArab būd Jabraʾil!
Bāz ʿArab rahm u mowāsāt dāsht;
dūsti u mehr u mowākhāt dāsht.
Garcheh ʿArab zad cho harāmi beh mā,
dād yeki dīn-e gerāmi be mā.
Garcheh ze jowr-e kholafāʾ sūkhtīm,
ze āl-e ʿAli maʿrefat amūkhtim.[560]

It would have been ideal to end this dissertation with texts such as the above since their egalitarian posture can hypothetically disrupt the hegemonic ascendency of the discourse I investigated in the previous chapters. Such texts have the potential to provide nuanced representations that acknowledge the complex role the Arabs have played in Persian history; both as relentless invaders and as bringers of a new religion. Writers like Bahār can reclaim what has been put under erasure in modern Iran by balancing the Arabs' historical agency with the profound changes they introduced in the country when they conquered it in the seventh century. Bahār's courageously standing at a liminal space between these two traditions brings to mind Khāqāni's ambivalent celebration of the Islamic conquest of Iran while at the same time reclaiming the latter's pre-Islamic

[560] Bahār, *Divān-e Ashʿār-e Mohammad Taqi Bahār* (Anthology of Poetry by Mohammad Taqi Bahār) ed. Malekzādeh, 802.

heritage. Such a move could have been a perfect antidote to the anti-Arab ideology that permeated the Persianate literary tradition in the twentieth century.[561]

Bahār was aware that his contemporaries were engaged in reinterpreting Khāqāni's ode about the ruins of Ctesiphon to be "the result of nationalistic and Iran-loving feelings."[562] In an article he published two years later in 1928, he censured such a trend and warned that the medieval poet was driven by "Islamic aspirations" and that "Islam has never had a homeland."[563] As I argued in Chapter Two, a locus for finding reconciliatory postures toward the Arabs and Islam in Iran was the travelogues that were written by the Persians *en route* to Mecca to perform the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Many a pious pilgrim who passed by the Ctesiphon ruins paused to contemplate the history of Arab Muslim conquest of Iran. To them, the ruins of the palace of the last Sasanian dynasty was a relic of Islam's victory, while its still-standing arch allegorized Iran's ancient history rising as undefeated.

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[561] It was beyond the scope of this dissertation, but close readings of Khāqāni's poetry can also reveal passages that express certain antipathy against the Arabs. Driven by either religious zeal or ethnic rivalry, the poet denounced the Arabs for laying control over such a holy place as Mecca. The "black Arabs," Khāqāni says in a poem, were like "snakes" safeguarding a treasure (*Kaʿbeh ganj ast u siyāhān-e ʿArab mārān-e ganj / gerd-e ganj ānk saff-e mārān farāvān āmadeh*). See Khāqāni, *Divān* (ed. Sajjādi), 371. For further examples see, Sābet, "Khāqāni Hamāvā bā Shoʿūbiyān" (Khāqāni in Harmony with the Shuʿubiyya).

[562] See Picture 14 for an artistic rendition of Arab Muslim conquest of Ctesiphon. The painting was feature in a literary competition for the best modern rewriting of Khāqāni's ode.

[563] Bahār, *Bahār va Adab-e Farsi* (Bahār and the Persian Literature), ed. Mohammad Golbon, vol. 1, 172. The potentially pan-Islamist underpinnings of this observation can be the topic of a project where similar aspirations provide the grounds for a competing narrative for the representation of Arabs in the Persianate tradition.

یك نقش عبرت بخش تاریخی

تصویر آتش زدن و غارت کردن قصر سلطنتی مداین و اسیر شدن شهربانو دختر یزدگرد دوم آخرین پادشاه ساسانی . بدست اعراب در سال ۳۱ هجری

اثر خامهٔ نقاش هنرور آقای میرزا حسینخان طاهرزادهٔ تبریزی

Picture 16: an artistic rendition of Arab Muslim sack of Ctesiphon by Mirzā Hossein Khān Tāherzādeh. Printed in *Irānshāhr* (March 21, 1925)

Bahār's rehabilitation of the image of Arabs was not without its flaws. Since it sometimes ended up patronizing the latter as some childish people utterly incapable of harming others. It must be noted that Bahār's outstanding contributions to Persian scholarship and numerous expressions of belief in Islam are enough to separate him from prejudiced and dogmatic figures like Mirzādeh ʿEshqi and Sadeq Hedayat. However, and despite this fact, certain type of patronizing outlook may also be identified in his seminal work on the history of Persian prose, *Sabkshenāsi* (Stylistics, 1942). Discussing the reasons behind the Sasanian Empire's downfall, Bahār postulates that internal dissent among the Persian nobility was the *real* reason behind the Arab conquest of Iran. By downplaying the potentially evil intentions of what he paradoxically calls the "swarm of naked Arabs" (*kheyl-e ʿoriyān-e ʿArab*), he in effect relegated the latter to the level of some primitive people who were only interested in religious conversion of the people they conquered. He spells out this hypothesis in unequivocal terms:

> From these introductory remarks we wish to conclude that Arab conquerors were inordinately tolerant with the people and exercised lenience. Because they were simple-minded and uncivilized Bedouins without manners and science (*che ānān mardomi badawi va sādeh-lowh va bi-tamaddon va dūr az ādāb u ʿolūm būdand*). The only culture and science they imposed on the conquered peoples included Islamic rituals such as praying, fasting and going to hajj.[564]

[564] Bahār, *Sabkshenāsi* (Stylistics), vol. 1, 229. The "tolerance" (*modārā*) and "lenience" (*mosāmeheh*) Bahār attributes to the invading Arabs has been challenged by some scholars. For example, see Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society*. For a polemical discussion of the atrocities the Arab conquerors' purportedly committed in Iran, see Zarrinkūb, *Do Qarn Sokūt* (Two Centuries of Silence).

In spite of his good intentions, these condescending remarks echo some of the most pejorative imagery we found in Hedayat's satirical writings. Hedayat's systematic repudiation of the Arabs' entitlement to a culture and a civilization always reinforced his ethnocentric assumptions about the superiority of his own culture and civilization. In fact, characterizing the Arabs in terms of certain cultural deficiencies may be considered a norm in his writings. In the texts I examined in this dissertation, the Arabs' supposedly inferior material culture usually endowed them with a lower standing on an imaginary evolutionary scheme. Not surprisingly, Hedayat projected himself to reside at the top of this staged developmental scheme, boasting of his country's superior art and architecture. Throughout his career, Hedayat hunted for the "proofs" of this presumed superiority. As I mentioned in my discussion of his early travelogue, "Isfahan, Half of the World," he entertained the idea that the idyllic Persian garden, as the ultimate product of Persian art and architecture, transcended the idealized imagery he found in the Quranic descriptions of paradise. To him, Iran *was* an earthly paradise, as its title, *minū-neshān* or "mark of paradise," indicated. To the antiquarian Hedayat, the old Muslim clergy sitting in the idyllic mosque in Isfahan symbolized the invading Arab Muslims finding a "foretaste of paradise" in Iran.

In the texts that mobilized this ideology, the Arabs were represented to be the lowest form of humanity, tantamount to "savages" and/or "barbarians" invading a superior civilization. The legacy of these highly charged concepts goes back to European colonial texts where Africans or the so-called "Orientals" were systematically downgraded to the level of "primitive" people, compared with the Europeans who projected themselves to be modern and progressive. Although Bahār does not reveal a particularly Eurocentric

orientation, his commodifying the Arabs by reducing them to their religious rituals and objects displays certain continuities with the essentialist representations we found in Hedayat's satirical writings where extensive catalogues of rituals and objects metonymically reduced the Arabs and their religion to mundane objects devoid of any transcendental value or significance.

As my examination of the palimpsestic quality of discourse of anti-Arab representation has hopefully shown, modern writers such as ʿEshqi and Hedayat not only played a crucial role in giving a new currency to antagonistic sentiments toward the Arabs in the early decades of the twentieth century. They also helped those sentiments to acquire hegemonic status in the institution of modern Persian literature. The traumatic history of invasion and conquest Hedayat dramatized in his first play, *Parvin* (1930), in many ways rehearsed ʿEshqi's imaginings about "barefooted" Arabs at the ruins of Ctesiphon. The trope of Arabs as subhuman invaders arguably had its genesis in modern Persian literature in the antiquarian fantasies ʿEshqi popularized in his very well received operetta, *Resurrection* (1921).

Due to space limitation, I could not examine in this dissertation the recent works that tend to echo Hedayat's negative sentiments toward the Arabs. In the past fifty years or so Hedayat's works have enjoyed an afterlife he never would have imagined! To mention only one example, the stereotypes of Arabs we found in Hedayat's works were refigured in a sequel the well-known writer of Iranian diaspora, Abbās Maʿrūfi, wrote to Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* (1936). The uncouth and "barefooted" marauding Arabs that wandered about Hedayat's works continue to haunt Maʿrūfi's *Peikar-e Farhād* (Farhād's Corpse, 2000) which rewrites Hedayat's masterpiece from the point of view of its female

character, the ethereal girl. Throughout the novel, panting and sweating Arabs pose a constant threat to the narrator. Pondering them, the ethereal girl wonders: "I don't know how they put on those dark woolen gowns in this heat, with their cumin-colored *ʿabā'* [Bedouin gown] while being barefoot. They were panting and the pungent odor of their sweat bothered me."[565] Despite his feminist ambitions, Maʿrūfi arguably ends up deconstructing his emancipatory agenda by reiterating the stereotypes he found in Hedayat's work. Hedayat's gaze on the Arabs' uncouth appearance and "abject" physiognomy reappears here as well. These continuities can help us identify an intertextual source of characterization for the representation of Arabs here as they explicitly originate from Hedayat's imaginings in *The Blind Owl*.[566]

In the early decades of the twentieth century, anti-Arab thought became so prevalent in Iran that even the travelogues of Persian pilgrims *en route* to Mecca became susceptible to some form of ideological prejudice against the Arabs. The pilgrims that traversed the southern frontiers of the Persian nation start recording chilling encounters with the inhabitants of the Arab lands during this time; encounters that are testimonies to how an emergent awareness about the physiognomy of Arabs as ethnically different penetrated various corners of the Persian literature.

A grim example of this ideological development may be found in a late-Qajar hajj travelogue written by a Persian cleric in 1914. In addition to its standard narration of obligatory religious duties, this narrative provides a look at the so-called contact zone

[565] Maʿrūfi, *Peikar-e Farhād* (Farhād's Corpse), 10.

[566] For intertextuality as a source of characterization in literature, see Richardson, *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (ed. Herman), 136-37.

where the paths of Persian pilgrims and Arab indigenes intersected in the Arabian Peninsula. The section I would like to cite chronicles the horrors of encountering the spectacle of Arabs at the middle of Hijaz wilderness. The following observations purport to be based on what the writer witnessed firsthand:

> Thank God that they did not keep us more than half an hour so we hit the road again. On both sides of the road, Bedouin Arabs – male and female like man-eating animals (*jānevarāt-e ādam-khār*) in various shapes even like dogs and pigs – stormed our car to beg. We thought they would swallow our car or us. In fact, if the guards had not stopped them, they would have swallowed the car.[567]

Their car makes a stop at an ancient location called al-Hejr so that the pilgrims can drink water. The "warm pungent water" the writer buys "from Arabs that looked like the ones I described above" leaves him far from satisfied. The setting of this particular section of the travelogue, al-Hejr, is also known as Madāʾen Sāleh (city of Sāleh) in Islamic sources. According to the Quran, al-Hejr is where the Thamūd people where punished for rejecting their prophet, Sāleh, and for killing the she-camel he brought to them as miracle (15:80-3).[568] Apprehensive of the area's daunting history, the writer averts his gaze to ponder the landscape that surrounds the ruins:

> Back on the road, we could see long ranges of mountains surrounding us. In that desert, there was nothing but thorn bushes and sand hills, ruins (*makhrūbeh*) [of

[567] Marjāni, "Safarnāmeh-ye Hajj" (Hajj Travelogue), 771.

[568] For al-Hejr ruins and their historical relevance, see *Encyclopedia of Islam* s.v., "al-Hejr;" and Biāzār-Shirazi, *Bāstān-shenāsi va Ĵoghrāfiyā-ye Tārikhi-ye Qesas-e Quran* (Archaeology and Historical Geography of Quranic Stories), 251-52.

> al-Hejr] and other daunting places that clearly were ravaged by divine retribution. We could even observe the mountain where the She-Camel of God appeared.[569]

The perils of travelling the Arab lands pose countless threats in this travelogue as several pilgrims are left behind in al-Hejr wilderness when they fail to finish their prayers in time to get back to the car. Pondering their ominous fate, the writer reflects on the horrors of the Arab lands:

> Who can forget the horrors of that desert? One dies a thousand deaths by seeing the roadsides that are vehemently protected by the guards; or the black mountain where the She-Camel of God appeared; or the doomed scorching desert that is devoid of any plants; or by seeing those black hungry cannibal Arabs who inundate (*rīkhteh u pāshideh*) the roadsides in countless numbers.[570]

Although the writer's fear of Bedouin highwaymen must be taken seriously,[571] yet the manner he portrays the local Arabs is comparable with what we found in Hedayat's stories where his narrator's traumatic encounter with the Arab "other" gave impetus to some of the most grotesque and repelling imagery we can find in modern Persian literature. The image of Arabs as "man-eating animals" lurking in a godforsaken desert shares fundamental similarities with the phantasmagoria of sub-humanized Arabs

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[569] Marjāni, "Safarnāmeh-ye Hajj" (Hajj Travelogue), 771. The landscape of al-Hejr was described by European travelers in the same manner. The British pilgrim traveler, Arthur J.B. Wavell, described the area in 1908 as follows: "The track wound through gloomy gorges over which huge rocks hung menacingly." Quoted in *One Thousand Roads to Mecca*, 302.

[570] Marjāni, "Safarnāmeh-ye Hajj" (Hajj Travelogue), 771.

[571] As it has been pointed out, throughout the ages, hajj caravans have always been "simple objects of extortion to any highwaymen, generally bedouin, in out-of-the-way places, of which there were many along every overland Hajj route." See Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, 110.

Hedayat's narrators discovered outside Iran in the so-called Arab lands. The satirical caricature of the Muslim cannibal in *A Muslim Delegation* who drooled over the idea of Islamicizing Europe was a comical manifestation of this anxiety. Yet, the writer of the foregoing travelogue does not mobilize the discourse of "othering" I identified in writers such as ʿEshqi and Hedayat. Since he never labels the Arabs as "savages" or "barbarians" and does not parade them in Eurocentric contexts to illustrate their supposed inferiority as unmodern or uncivilized. In contrast, and interestingly enough, he makes recourse to another discourse of "othering" to cast the Arabs as *godless subhumans*, dwelling in an environment that looks abnormal to him in every sense. (He constantly looks for signs of vegetation and only finds thorn bushes in the "frightening wilderness" surrounding al-Hejr.[572])

It is fascinating that once again some archaeological remains become the locus of another ideological war against the Arabs in order to represent them as distinct from and lesser to the Persians. The writer of the foregoing travelogue does not show any penchant for antiquarianism, like what we found in ʿEshqi and Hedayat, and never alludes to Ctesiphon ruins either – something many hajj writers do almost ritualistically. His attention to the ruins is more like a pious acknowledgment of the history that is recorded in the Quran, and the lessons he can learn from the fate of those who transgressed

[572] Lack of vegetation in certain Arab lands, especially in the Arabian Peninsula, is a topic many Persian pilgrims have utilized as a metonym for Arab alterity. Even the celebrated medieval poet and philosopher, Nāser Khosrow (1004-1088), found it hard to comprehend that certain Arab Bedouins "in their whole lives they had drunk nothing but camel's milk, since in the desert there is nothing but bitter scrub eaten by the camels. They actually imagined that the whole world was like this!" See Nāser Khosrow, *Safarnāmeh* (Book of Travels), trans. Thackston, 83-4.

against Allah. Reminiscent of Khāqāni's attention to the ruins of the conquered Sasanians at Ctesiphon, this Persian pilgrim looks at the ruins of ancient al-Hejr as a source of "admonishment" (*ʿebrat*), performing what a prophetic tradition has recommended.[573] The arch of the Quranic narrative is still intact here as the ruins still perform their teleological function of encouraging the pilgrims to contemplate "signs" of Allah's mighty power.

It is important to note that the writer never brings himself to admit the fact that these people are Muslims as well, or that he is traveling the birthplace of Islam! After dismissing the religious standing of the people of al-Hejr and potentially denigrating them to the level of non-believers, the writer endeavors to negate their humanity by representing them as a *sub-humanized* swarm. His dehumanizing gaze turns indigenous people into extremely despised animals such as "dogs" (*al-kalb*) and "pigs" (*al-khenzīr*). The writer uses these two animals' Arabic names arguably to mobilize an important Islamic legacy. According to popular Islamic tradition, pigs are "considered to be the metamorphosis of an impious person expiating the divine punishment."[574] To him, the Arabs still bear the mark of the punishment Allah inflicted on the Thamūd people.

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[573] As the tradition has it, Prophet Mohammad asked his followers to "step into the houses of oppressors [at al-Hejr] with an eye for admonishment, and fear that what happened to them may befall you as well." See Biāzār-Shirazi, *Bāstān-shenāsi va Joghrāfiyā-ye Tārikhi Qesas-e Quran* (Archaeology and Historical Geography of Quranic Stories), 3. It is not clear if the writer of this travelogue was aware of this prophetic tradition.

[574] See *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* s.v., "Khinzīr." Medieval Arab theologian, Mohammad Damiri (1342-1342), cites traditions in his zoological work, *Hayāt al-Hayawān* (Animal Life), where certain Jews are turned into pigs by a curse by Jesus Christ. See Damiri, *Ad-Damiri's Hayāt al-Hayawān* (*A Zoological Lexicon*), trans. Jayakar, 703.

This Quranic discourse of "othering" could seamlessly work with the secular discourse of "othering" I identified in the previous chapters in order to paint the Arabs as transgressor "others" beyond the pale of normalcy. The result of this cooperation is devastating as the writer's convictions about the Arabs as the sum of all heresies go hand in hand with his assumptions about their nefarious source of subsistence (cannibalism) and post-apocalyptic habitat.

It is striking that regardless of their intellectual and/or religious orientations, the writers studied here always harbor certain fantasies about Arab material culture, and especially their dietary habits. To them, these function as metonyms for assessing their civilizational status in contradistinction to the Arabs, which they represent as inferior people. This writer's nightmares about Arabs ripping off pilgrim's flesh may very well be read vis-à-vis Hedayat's remarks about their consuming lizard – another "unorthodox" food (from a Persian standpoint). As I argued in the Introduction, claims such as these tend to stall the Arabs in the worst stages of their history by representing them as living embodiments of the accursed Thamūd people, unchanged even after centuries have passed.

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